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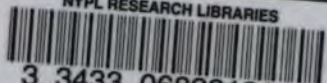
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STANDARD WORKS
OF
THE SOCIETY
FOR THE
DIFFUSION OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

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EDITING COMMITTEE.

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REV. JAMES LILLIE.

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REV. JOHN N. MLEOD.

"Prove all things, hold fast that which is good."—Paul.

ISRAEL POST, GENERAL AGENT, 88 BOWERY

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE SOCIETY FOR THE DIFFUSION OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE, in presenting this publication to the Christian community, deems it necessary to state the objects contemplated in the formation of said association. The persons who compose it will be a sufficient guarantee, that we aim neither at pecuniary aggrandizement, nor the advancement of any Sectarian projects. It is our desire to devote our feeble exertions to the promotion of those general interests of Christ's religion, in which we can all take a part. This society is founded upon the principle, that if the Bible be a Divine Revelation, it ought not to shun the light, or avoid an investigation of the grounds upon which we receive it. We wish to carry that principle into practice, by bringing before the community, the evidences upon which *we* receive the sacred Scriptures as the word of God. We are deeply convinced that such information is needed, particularly to guard the rising generation against the pernicious principles to which they are exposed. We consider it a misfortune, that in the religious education of our youth, sufficient pains are not taken to make them acquainted with the reasons, upon which they are required to receive the Gospel. They are thus unprepared to meet the objections which may be urged against it; and feeling, perhaps, that the restraints of religion do not accord with their inclinations, they are induced to listen to these objections, and from the want of proper information, have been, in too many instances, led from *the faith once delivered to the saints*. In a mixed community like that in which we live, every parent has reason for apprehension, and must wish for those means, which may be calculated to fortify his children against temptation, and keep them from forsaking the worship of their Fathers' God. In the multiplicity of institutions, which have been formed for purposes of Christian benevolence, we know of none, which directly contemplates this object; and it is our purpose to occupy this field, believing that a judicious selection of works, on the evidences of Christianity, and on the first principles of Protestantism, will be highly useful in strengthening the faith of believers, and of preventing many a one from being led away from the truth, as it is in Jesus Christ. It is not our intention to engage in controversy, but to act on the defensive in protecting the Temple of our God ~~on~~ the assaults of its enemies. Our objects are general, and we therefore ~~at~~ a confidence in asking the support of Christians of all denominations.

AN APOLOGY
FOR
THE BIBLE,
IN A
SERIES OF LETTERS,
ADDRESSED TO
THOMAS PAINE,
AUTHOR OF THE BOOK ENTITLED
THE AGE OF REASON, PART THE SECOND,
BEING
AN INVESTIGATION
OF
TRUE AND FABULOUS THEOLOGY.

BY R. WATSON, DD. F.R.S.

LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF, AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

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CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

1835.



ROY W. B.
CLERK
V. 1861

P R E F A C E.

It may admit of doubt, whether the open and unmingled contempt which the name of Paine excites among Christians, be justified by that fairness which they ought to feel, and which their religion can well afford to all its adversaries; or by a due regard to the restoration of those who may be in danger of being misled by the plausibilities of that well known writer. The disapprobation awakened by his shameless immorality, and the contempt necessarily inspired by his singular want of information on the subject about which he dogmatises, ought not to be extended to the talents which he had received from his Maker. These were more than ordinary. His "Common Sense," and "Crisis," written in defence of our own Revolution, contributed essentially to the success of that righteous cause. His "Rights of Man" published in reply to Burke on the French Revolution, is a production of merit, distinguished by considerable acuteness of thought, play of fancy, and a pungent brevity of style; though at the same time, it must be allowed, disfigured by that infidelity which came forth at last in its unveiled hideousness in the "Age of Reason."

The just distinction which Paine had earned in the cause of freedom, paved the way for his ready and even enthusiastic reception as a writer on Religion. Here, however, his ordinary resources failed him. Even his head was no match for his heart; nor his natural acuteness, for his total ignorance of the first elements of Biblical Criticism. This, it is conceived is very conclusively demonstrated, in "Watson's Apology for the Bible." This work though noticed at the time of its appearance, still remains unanswered. The attempts at reply have perished. An answer which shall show any of the vitality of the Apology, or even of

the work which the Apology exposes, must be felt to be a desideratum among Infidels. They must see that something more is required to aid their cause, than *literally* trampling on the Bible with Robert Taylor of England—an example which it would appear has been rather servilely copied nearer home. Nothing but the ruin of the Infidel cause ought to be anticipated from such a barrenness of invention. Paine would have been ashamed of it. *He* thought he could *write* the Bible out of repute, and Watson proved he was mistaken; it remained for his disciples now-a-days to imagine they might *kick* it into contempt. Even *they* ought to know that the public will not fail to infer an incurable deficiency in the heads of those, who on such an emergency betake themselves to their heels.

W. D. STROBEL,
ERSKINE MASON,
JAMES LILLIE,
W. R. WILLIAMS,
M. S. HUTTON,
JOHN N. McLEOD,
Editing Committee.

LETTER I.

SIR—

I HAVE lately met with a book of yours entitled *THE AGE OF REASON*, part the second, being an investigation of true and of fabulous theology; and I think it not inconsistent with my station, and the duty I owe to society, to trouble you and the world with some observations on so extraordinary a performance. Extraordinary I esteem it, not from any novelty in the objections which you have produced against revealed religion (for I find little or no novelty in them,) but from the zeal with which you labor to disseminate your opinions, and from the confidence with which you esteem them true. You perceive by this, that I give you credit for your sincerity, how much-soever I may question your wisdom, in writing in such a manner, on such a subject; and I have no reluctance in acknowledging, that you possess a considerable share of energy of language, and acuteness of investigation; though I must be allowed to lament, that these talents have not been applied in a manner more useful to human kind, and more creditable to yourself.

I begin with your preface. You therein state—that you had long had an intention of publishing your thoughts upon religion, but that you had originally reserved it to a later period in life—I hope there is no want of charity in saying, that it would have been fortunate for the Christian world, had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention. In accomplishing your purpose, you will have unsettled the faith of thousands; rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous all their comfortable assurances of a future recompense; have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future punishment; you will have given the reins to the domination of every passion, and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public insecurity, and of the private unhappiness, usually and almost necessarily accompanying a state of corrupt morals.

No one can think worse of confession to a priest and subsequent absolution, as practised in the church of Rome, than I do; but I cannot, with you, attribute the guillotine massacres to that cause. Men's minds were not prepared, as you suppose, for the commission of all manner of crimes, by any doctrines of the church of Rome, corrupted as I esteem it, but by their not thoroughly believing even that religion. What may not society expect from those, who shall imbibe the principles of your book?

A fever, which you and those about you expected would prove mortal, made you remember, with renewed satisfaction, that you had written the former part of your *Age of Reason*—and you know therefore, you say, by experience, the conscientious trial of your own principles. I admit this declaration to be a proof of the sincerity of your persuasion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of the truth of your principles.

What is conscience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and dictating to us, on all occasions, what is right, or wrong? Or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude or turpitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr. Locke) in the latter, as the only intelligible sense. Now who sees not that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and dispassionate use of our reason, in the investigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profess; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the persons with whom we associate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental causes. Who sees not that, on this account, conscience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature?—may be certain, or doubtful—and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude, even when it is certain, because the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly persuaded of an error in reasoning, or an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human and divine, that a man ought never to act in opposition to his conscience, but it will not from thence follow, that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conscience, on all occasions act right. An inquisitor, who burns Jews and heretics; a Robespierre, who massacres innocent and harmless women; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of propriety is an unjust infringement of natural liberty;—these, and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience; and may, at the real or supposed approach of death, remember “with renewed satisfaction,” the worst of their transactions, and experience without dismay “a conscientious trial of their principles.” But this, their conscientious composure, can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence, in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly, and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established?—You will allow, that thousands of learned and impartial men, (I speak not of priests, who, however, are I trust, as learned and impartial as yourself, but of laymen of the most splendid talents)—you will allow, that thousands of these, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition, whilst you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That Gospel, which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me—“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.” I think that you are in an error; but

whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible error, I presume not to determine. I know indeed where it is said—"that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness,—and that if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." The consequence of your unbelief must be left to the just and merciful judgment of Him, who alone knoweth the mechanism and the liberty of our understandings; the origin of our opinions; the strength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reasoning faculties.

I shall, designedly, write this and the following letters in a popular manner; hoping that thereby they may stand a chance of being perused by that class of readers, for whom your work seems to be particularly calculated, and who are the most likely to be injured by it. The really learned are in no danger of being infected by the poison of Infidelity; they will excuse me, therefore, for having entered as little as possible, into deep disquisitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. The subject has been so learnedly, and so frequently, handled by other writers, that it does not want (I had almost said, it does not admit) any further proof. And it is the more necessary to adopt this mode of answering your book, because you disclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of credit. I hope to show, from the Bible itself, the direct contrary. But in case any of your readers should think that you had not put forth all your strength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors; lest they should expect that all ancient authors are in your favor; I will venture to affirm, that had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, sacred or profane, Christian, Jewish, or Pagan, instead of lessening, they would have established the credit and authority of the Bible as the word of God.

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itself, in which there is much repetition, and a defect of proper arrangement. I will follow your track, however, as nearly as I can. The first question you propose for consideration is—"Whether there is sufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the Word of God, or whether there is not?" You determine this question in the negative, upon what you are pleased to call moral evidence. You hold it impossible that the Bible can be the Word of God, because it is therein said, that the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites by the express command of God; and to believe the Bible to be true, we must, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral justice of God; for wherein, you ask, could crying or smiling infants offend?—I am astonished that so acute a reasoner should attempt to disparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. You profess yourself to be a deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess that from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes; and you reject the Bible, because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him; in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice, that he should doom to destruction the crying or smiling infants of the Canaanites.—Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral justice, that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an

earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by pestilence? The word of God is in perfect harmony with his work; crying or smiling infants are subjected to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the express command of God, opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. This you esteem so repugnant to God's moral justice, that you spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men with their wives, their sons, and their little ones, were swallowed up alive—why do you not spurn as spurious, the book of nature in which this fact is certainly written, and from the perusal of which you infer the moral justice of God? You will, probably, reply that the evils which the Canaanites suffered from the express command of God, were different from those which were brought on mankind, by the operation of the laws of nature.—Different! in what?—Not in the magnitude of the evil—not in the subjects of sufferance—not in the author of it—for my philosophy, at least, instructs me to believe, that God not only primarily formed, but that he has through all ages executed the laws of nature; and that he will through all eternity administer them, for the general happiness of his creatures, whether we can, on every occasion, discern that end or not.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of questioning the existence of the moral justice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion; what I contend for is shortly this—that you have no right, in fairness of reasoning, to urge any apparent deviation from moral justice as an argument against revealed religion, because you do not urge an equally apparent deviation from it, as an argument against natural religion: you reject the former, and admit the latter, without adverting that, as to your objection, they must stand or fall together.

As to the Canaanites, it is needless to enter into any proof of the depraved state of their morals; they were a wicked people in the time of Abraham, and they, even then, were devoted to destruction by God; but their iniquity was not then full. In the time of Moses, they were idolaters, sacrificers of their own crying or smiling infants; devourers of human flesh; addicted to unnatural lusts; immersed in the filthiness of all manner of vice. Now, I think, it will be impossible to prove, that it was a proceeding contrary to God's moral justice, to exterminate so wicked a people. He made the Israelites the executors of his vengeance; and, in doing this, he gave such an evident and terrible proof of his abomination to vice, as could not fail to strike the surrounding nations with astonishment and terror, and to impress on the minds of the Israelites what they were to expect, if they followed the example of the nations whom he commanded them to cut off. "Ye shall not commit any of these abominations—that the land spue not you out also, as it spued out the nations before you." How strong and descriptive this language! the vices of the inhabitants were so abominable, that the very land was sick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the stomach disgorges a deadly poison.

I have often wondered what could be the reason that men, not destitute of talents, should be desirous of undermining the authority of revealed religion, and studious in exposing, with a malignant and illiberal exultation, every little difficulty attending the Scriptures, to popular

animadversion and contempt. I am not willing to attribute this strange propensity to what Plato attributed the atheism of his time—to profligacy of manners—to affectation of singularity—to gross ignorance, assuming the semblance of deep research and superior sagacity.—I had rather refer it to an impropriety of judgment respecting the manners and mental acquirements of human kind in the first ages of the world. Most unbelievers argue as if they thought that man, in remote and rude antiquity, in the very birth and infancy of our species, had the same distinct conceptions of one, eternal, invisible, incorporeal, infinitely wise, powerful and good God, which they themselves have now. This I look upon as a great mistake, and a pregnant source of infidelity. Human kind, by long experience; by the institutions of civil society; by the cultivation of arts and science; by, as I believe, divine instruction actually given to some, and traditionally communicated to all; is in a far more distinguished situation, as to the powers of the mind, than it was in the childhood of the world. The history of man, is the history of the providence of God; who, willing the supreme felicity of all his creatures, has adapted his government to the capacity of those, who in different ages were the subjects of it. The history of any one nation throughout all ages, and that of all nations in the same age, are but separate parts of one great plan, which God is carrying on for the moral melioration of mankind. But who can comprehend the whole of this immense design? The shortness of life, the weakness of our faculties, the inadequacy of our means of information, conspire to make it impossible for us, worms of the earth, insects of an hour, completely to understand any one of its parts. No man, who well weighs the subject, ought to be surprised, that in the histories of ancient times many things should occur foreign to our manners, the propriety and necessity of which we cannot clearly apprehend.

It appears incredible to many, that God Almighty should have had colloquial intercourse with our first parents; that he should have contracted a kind of friendship for the patriarchs, and entered into covenants with them; that he should have suspended the laws of nature in Egypt; should have been so apparently partial as to become the God and governor of one particular nation; and should have so far demeaned himself, as to give to that people a burdensome ritual of worship, statutes and ordinances, many of which seem to be beneath the dignity of his attention, unimportant and impolitic. I have conversed with many deists, and have always found that the strangeness of these things was the only reason for their disbelief of them: nothing similar has happened in their time; they will not, therefore, admit, that these events have really taken place at any time. As well might a child, when arrived at a state of manhood, contend that he never either stood in need of, or experienced the fostering care of a mother's kindness, the wearisome attention of his nurse, or the instruction and discipline of his schoolmaster. The Supreme Being selected one family from an idolatrous world; nursed it up, by various acts of his providence, into a great nation; communicated to that nation a knowledge of his holiness, justice, mercy, power, and wisdom; disseminated them at various times, through every part of the earth, that they might be a "leaven to leaven the whole lump," that they might assure all other nations of the existence of one supreme God, the creator and preserver of the world, the only

proper object of adoration. With what reason can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, should be done to all? That the mode of instruction, which was suited to the infancy of the world, should be extended to the maturity of its manhood, or to the imbecility of its old age? I own to you, that when I consider how nearly man, in a savage state, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence, and when I contemplate his miserable attainments, as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized state, when he has had no divine instruction on the subject, or when that instruction has been forgotten, (for all men have known something of God from tradition) I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, in having let himself down to our apprehensions: in having given to mankind, in the earliest ages, sensible and extraordinary proofs of his existence and attributes; in having made the Jewish and Christian dispensations mediums to convey to all men, through all ages, that knowledge concerning himself, which he has vouchsafed to give immediately to the first. I own it is strange, very strange, that he should have made an immediate manifestation of himself in the first ages of the world; but what is there that is not strange? It is strange that you and I are here—that there is water, and earth, and air, and fire—that there is a sun, and moon, and stars—that there is generation, corruption, reproduction. I can account ultimately for none of these things, without recurring to him who made every thing. I also am his workmanship, and look up to him with hope of preservation through all eternity; I adore him for his word as well as for his work: his work I cannot comprehend, but his word hath assured me of all that I am concerned to know—that he hath prepared everlasting happiness for those who love and obey him. This you will call preachment—I will have done with it; but the subject is so vast, and the plan of providence, in my opinion, so obviously wise and good, that I can never think of it without having my mind filled with piety, admiration, and gratitude.

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleased to think it) against the Bible, you threaten in the progress of your work, to produce such other evidence as even a priest cannot deny. A philosopher in search of truth, forfeits with me all claim to candour and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reasoning, vulgar and illiberal sarcasm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you set me: but examine what you shall produce, with as much coolness and respect, as if you had given the priests no provocation; as if you were a man of the most unblemished character, subject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad designs, nor liable to have abuse retorted upon you with success.

LETTER II.

BEFORE you commence your grand attack upon the Bible, you wish to establish a difference between the evidence necessary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. I am

not surprised at your anxiety on this head; for all writers on the subject have agreed in thinking that St. Austin reasoned well, when, in vindicating the genuineness of the Bible, he asked—"What proofs have we that the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro, and other profane authors, were written by those whose name they bear; unless it be that this has been an opinion generally received at all times, and by all those who have lived since the authors?" This writer was convinced, that the evidence which established the genuineness of any profane book, would establish that of the sacred book; and I profess myself to be of the same opinion, notwithstanding what you have advanced to the contrary.

In this part your ideas seem to me to be confused; I do not say that you, designedly, jumble together mathematical science and historical evidence; the knowledge acquired by demonstration, and the probability derived from testimony. You know but one ancient book, that authoritatively challenges universal consent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements. If I were disposed to make frivolous objections, I should say that even Euclid's Elements had not met with universal consent; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had questioned the intuitive evidence of some of his axioms, and denied the justness of some of his demonstrations: but, admitting the truth, I do not see the pertinency of your observation. You are attempting to subvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's Elements are certainly true. What then? Does it follow that the Bible is certainly false? The most illiterate scrivener in the kingdom does not want to be informed, that the examples in his Wingate's Arithmetic, are proved by a different kind of reasoning from that by which he persuades himself to believe, that there was such a person as Henry VIII. or that there is such a city as Paris.

It may be of use to remove this confusion in your argument, to state, distinctly, the difference between the genuineness, and the authenticity of a book. A genuine book, is that which was written by the person whose name it bears, as the author of it. An authentic book, is that which relates to matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine without being authentic; and a book may be authentic, without being genuine. The books written by Richardson and Fielding, are genuine books, though the histories of Clarissa and Tom Jones are fables. The history of the Island of Formosa is a genuine book; it was written by Psalmanazar; but it is not an authentic book (though it was long esteemed as such, and translated into different languages) for the author, in the latter part of his life, took shame to himself for having imposed on the world, and confessed that it was a mere romance. Anson's Voyage may be considered as an authentic book, it, probably, containing a true narration of the principle events recorded in it: but it is not a genuine book having not been written by Walters, to whom it is ascribed, but by Robins.

This distinction between the genuineness and authenticity of a book, will assist us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you state with great confidence in the part of your work now under consideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as conclusive evidence against the truth of the Bible. Your arguments stand thus—if it be found that the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel,

were not written by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of these books is gone at once. I presume to think otherwise. The genuineness of those books (in the judgment of those who say that they were written by these authors) will certainly be gone; but their authenticity may remain; they may still contain a true account of real transactions, though the names of the writers of them should be found to be different from what they are generally esteemed to be.

Had, indeed, Moses said that he wrote the first five books of the Bible; and had Joshua and Samuel said that they wrote the books which are respectively attributed to them; and had it been found, that Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, did not write these books; then, I grant, the authority of the whole would have been gone at once; these men would have been found liars, as to the genuineness of the books; and this proof of their want of veracity, in one point, would have invalidated their testimony in every other; these books would have been justly stigmatized, as neither genuine nor authentic.

A history may be true, though it should not only be ascribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it should not be known; anonymous testimony does not destroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous. Had lord Clarendon published his History of the Rebellion, without prefixing his name to it; or had the History of Titus Livius come down to us, under the name of Valerius Flaccus, or Valerius Maximus; the facts mentioned in these histories would have been equally certain.

As to your assertion, that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane historians, are quite as well authenticated as those of the Bible—it, being a mere assertion, destitute of proof, may be properly answered by a contrary assertion. I take the liberty then to say, that the evidence for the miracles recorded in the Bible is, both in kind and degree, so greatly superior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to justify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in withholding it from the other as the effect of superstition and imposture. This method of derogating from the credibility of Christianity, by opposing to the miracles of our Saviour, the tricks of ancient impostors, seems to have originated with Hierocles in the fourth century; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this; with this difference, indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jesus wrought miracles; but lest that admission should have compelled them to abandon their gods and become Christians, they said, that their *Apolonius*, their *Apuleius*, their *Aristeas*, did as great: whilst modern deists deny the fact of Jesus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have some reason for this proceeding; they are sensible that the gospel miracles are so different, in all their circumstances, from those related in pagan story, that, if they admit them to have been performed, they must admit Christianity to be true; hence they have fabricated a kind of deistical axiom—that no human testimony can establish the credibility of a miracle.—This, though it has been an hundred times refuted, is still insisted upon, as if its truth had never been questioned, and could not be disproved.

You “proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible; and you begin, you say, with what are called the five books of Moses, Genesis,

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Your intention, you profess, is to show that these books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them; and still farther, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards; that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in which he is said to have lived, and also of times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, several hundred years after the death of Moses."—In this passage the utmost force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moses is clearly stated. You are not the first who has started this difficulty; it is a difficulty, indeed, of modern date; having not been heard of, either in synagogue, or out of it, till the twelfth century. About that time *Aben Ezra*, a Jew of great erudition, noticed some passages (the same that you have brought forward) in the five first books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moses, but inserted by some person after the death of Moses. But he was far from maintaining, as you do, that these books were written by some ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, many hundred years after the death of Moses. *Hobbes* contends that the Books of Moses are so called, not from their having been written by Moses, but from their containing an account of Moses. *Spinoza* supported the same opinion; and *Le Clerc*, a very able theological critic of the last and present century, once entertained the same notion. You see that this fancy has had some patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the sagacity or the temerity of having asserted that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, is not entirely yours. *Le Clerc*, indeed, you must not boast of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was ashamed of what he had written on the subject in his younger years; he made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his commentary on Genesis, a Latin dissertation—concerning Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, and his design in composing it. If in your future life you should chance to change your opinion on the subject, it will be an honor to your character to emulate the integrity, and to imitate the example of *Le Clerc*. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as spurious, after it had been received as genuine and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained that the history of *Herodotus* was written in the time of *Constantine*; and that the Classics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. These extravagant reveries amused the world at the time of their publication, and have long since sunk into oblivion. You esteem all prophets to be such lying rascals, that I dare not predict the fate of your book.

Before you produce your main objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you assert—"That there is no affirmative evidence that Moses is the author of them."—What? no affirmative evidence? In the eleventh century *Maimonides* drew up a confession of faith for the Jews, which all of them at this day admit; it consists only of thirteen articles; and two of them have respect to Moses; one affirming the authenticity, the other the genuineness of his books.—The doctrine and prophecy of Moses is true.—The law that we have was given by Moses.—This is the faith of the Jews at present, and has been their faith ever since the destruction of their city and temple; it was their faith in the time when the authors of the New Testament wrote; it was their faith

during their captivity in Babylon ; in the time of their kings and judges, and no period can be shewn, from the age of Moses to the present hour, in which it was not their faith.—Is this no affirmative evidence ? I cannot desire a stronger. *Josephus*, in his book against *Appion*, writes thus—“ We have only two and twenty books which are to be believed as of divine authority, and which comprehend the history of all ages ; five belong to Moses, which contain the original of man and the tradition of the succession of generations, down to his death, which takes in a compass of about three thousand years.” Do you consider this as no affirmative evidence ? Why should I mention *Juvenal* speaking of the volume which Moses had written ? Why enumerate a long list of profane authors, all bearing testimony to the fact of *Moses* being the leader and the law-giver of the Jewish nation ? And if a law-giver, surely, a writer of the laws. But what says the Bible ? In Exodus it says—“ Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people.”—In Deuteronomy it says—“ And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished (this surely imports the finishing of a laborious work) that Moses commanded the Levites, which bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for witness against thee.” This is said in Deuteronomy, which is a kind of repetition or abridgment of the four preceding books ; and it is well known that the Jews gave the name of the Law to the first five books of the Old Testament. What possible doubt can there be that Moses wrote the books in question ? I could accumulate many other passages from the scriptures to this purpose ; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the strongest kind, for Moses’ being the author of these books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

What if I should grant all you undertake to prove (the stupidity and ignorance of the writer excepted) ? What if I should admit that *Samuel* or *Ezra*, or some other learned Jew, composed those books from public records, many years after the death of Moses ? Will it follow that there was no truth in them ? According to my logic, it will only follow, that they are not genuine books ; every fact recorded in them may be true, whenever, or by whomsoever, they were written. It cannot be said that the Jews had no public records ; the Bible furnishes abundance of proof to the contrary. I by no means admit, that these books, as to the main part of them, were not written by Moses ; but I do contend, that a book may contain a true history, though we knew not the author of it or though we may be mistaken in ascribing it to a wrong author.

The first argument you produce against Moses being the author of these books is so old, that I do not know its original author ; and it is so miserable a one, that I wonder you should adopt it.—“ These books cannot be written by Moses, because they are wrote in the third person—it is always, the Lord said unto Moses, or Moses said unto the Lord. This, you say, is the style and manner that historians use in speaking of the person whose lives and actions they are writing.” This observation is true, but it does not extend far enough ; for this is the style and manner not only of historians writing of other persons, but of eminent men, such as *Xenophon* and *Josephus*, writing of themselves. If General

Washington should write the history of the American War, and should, from his great modesty, speak of himself in the third person, would you think it reasonable that, two or three thousand years hence, any person should, on that account, contend that the history was not true? *Cæsar* writes of himself in the third person. It is always, *Cæsar* made a speech, or a speech was made to *Cæsar*, *Cæsar* crossed the Rhine, *Cæsar* invaded Britain; but every school-boy knows, that this circumstance cannot be adduced as a serious argument against *Cæsar's* being the author of his own Commentaries.

But *Moses*, you urge, cannot be the author of the book of Numbers, because he says of himself—"that *Moses* was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth." If he said this of himself, he was, as you say, "a vain and arrogant coxcomb (such is your phrase) and unworthy of credit—and if he did not say it, the *books* are without authority." This your dilemma is perfectly harmless; it has not a horn to hurt the weakest logician. If *Moses* did not write this little verse, if it was inserted by Samuel, or any of his countrymen, who knew his character and revered his memory, will it follow that he did not write any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers, will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is usually reputed the author? And if he did write this of himself, he was justified by the occasion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expression been written in a modern style and manner it would probably have given you no offence. For who would be so fastidious as to find fault with an illustrious man, who, being calumniated by his nearest relations, as guilty of pride and fond of power, should vindicate his character by saying—my temper was naturally as meek and unassuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occasions, in which a modest man, who speaks truly, may speak proudly of himself, without forfeiting his general character; and there is no occasion, which either more requires, or more excuses this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aspersions of those who both knew his character and had experienced his kindness; and in that predicament stood *Aaron* and *Miriam*, the accusers of *Moses*. You yourself have probably felt the sting of calumny, and have been anxious to remove the impression. I do not call you a vain and arrogant coxcomb for vindicating your character, when in the latter part of this very work you boast, and I hope truly, "the man does not exist that can say I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, in the American Revolution or in the French Revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for evil." I know not what kings and priests may say to this: you may not have returned to them evil for evil, because they never, I believe, did you any harm; but you have done them all the harm you could, and that without provocation.

I think it needless to notice your observation upon what you call the dramatic style of Deuteronomy: it is an ill founded hypothesis. You might as well ask, where the author of *Cæsar's* Commentaries got the speeches of *Cæsar*, as where the author of Deuteronomy got the speeches of *Moses*. But your argument—that *Moses* was not the author of Deuteronomy, because the reason given in that book for the observation of the Sabbath, is different from that given in Exodus, merits a reply.

You need not be told that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law: and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the same meaning. In the fifth verse of the first chapter it is said in our Bibles, "Moses began to declare this law;" but the Hebrew words, more properly translated, import that "Moses began, or determined to explain the law." This is no shift of mine to get over a difficulty; the words are so rendered in most of the ancient versions, and by *Fagius*, *Vetabius* and *Le Clerc*, men eminently skilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law, was a wise and benevolent proceeding in Moses: that those who were either not born, or were mere infants, when it was first (forty years before) delivered in Horeb, might have an opportunity of knowing it; especially as Moses their leader was soon to be taken from them, and they were about to be settled in the midst of nations given to idolatry and sunk in vice. Now where is the wonder, that some variations, and some additions, should be made to a law, when a legislator thinks fit to republish it many years after its first promulgation.

With respect to the Sabbath, the learned are divided in opinion concerning its origin; some contending that it was sanctified from the creation of the world; that it was observed by the patriarchs before the flood; that it was neglected by the Israelites during their bondage in Egypt; revived on the falling of manna in the wilderness; and enjoined as a positive law at Sinai. Others esteem its institution to have been no older than the age of Moses; and argue, that what is said of the sanctification of the Sabbath in the book of Genesis, is said by way of anticipation. There may be truth in both these accounts. To me it is probable that the memory of the creation was handed down from Adam to all his posterity; and that the seventh day was for a long time, held sacred by all nations, in commemoration of that event; but that the peculiar rigidity of its observance was enjoined by Moses to the Israelites alone. As to their being two reasons given for its being kept holy,—one, that on that day God rested from the work of creation—the other, on that day God had given them rest from the servitude of Egypt—I see no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the history of England, should inform his readers that the parliament had ordered the fifth day of November to be kept holy, because on that day God delivered the nation from a bloody-intended massacre by gunpowder; and, if, in another part of his history, he should assign the deliverance of our church and nation from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of King William, as a reason for its being kept holy; would any one contend that he was not justified in both these ways of expression, or that we ought from thence to conclude, that he was not the author of them both.

You think—"that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorises parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death for what it is pleased to call stubbornness." You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power, amongst the *Romans*, the *Gauls*, the *Persians*, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away of the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites in the time of Moses exercised this paternal power; it was not a custom adopted by all nations; but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had

coalesced into communities, it was probably very general. Now Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised amongst the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate—the father and mother of the child must agree in bringing the child to judgment—and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death; the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true: and the accusation was to be not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was “stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard.” Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been a humane restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent.

That you may abuse the priests, you abandon your subject—“Priests,” you say, “preach up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tithes.” I do not know that priests preach up Deuteronomy, more than they preach up other books of scripture; but I do know that tithes are not preached up in Deuteronomy, more than in Leviticus, in Numbers, in Chronicles, in Malichi, in the law, the history, and the prophets of the Jewish nation. You go on, “It is from this book, chap. xxv, ver. 4, they have taken the phrase, and applied it to tithing ‘Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn:’ and that this might not escape observation, they have noted it in the table of the contents at the head of the chapter, though it is only a single verse of less than two lines. O priests! priests! ye are willing to be compared to an ox for the sake of tithes!” I cannot call this—reasoning—and I will not pollute my page by giving it a proper appellation. Had the table of contents, instead of simply saying—the ox is not to be muzzled, said—tithes enjoined, or priests to be maintained—there would have been a little ground for your censure. Whoever noted this phrase at the head of the chapter, had better reason for doing it than you have attributed to them. They did it, because St. Paul had quoted it, when he was proving to the Corinthians, that they who preached the gospel had a right to live by the gospel; it was Paul, and not the priests, who first applied this phrase to tithing. St. Paul, indeed, did not avail himself of the right he contended for; he was not therefore, interested in what he said. The reason, on which he grounds the right, is not merely this quotation, which you ridicule; nor the appointment of the law of Moses, which you think fabulous; nor the injunction of Jesus, which you despise; no, it is a reason founded in the nature of things, and which no philosopher, no unbeliever, no man of common sense can deny to be a solid reason; it amounts to this—that “The labourer is worthy of his hire.” Nothing is so much a man’s own, as his labor and ingenuity; and it is entirely consonant to the law of nature, that by the innocent use of these he should provide for his subsistence. Husbandmen, artists, soldiers, physicians, lawyers, all let out their labor and talents for a stipulated reward: why may not a priest do the same? Some accounts of you have been published in England; but, conceiving them to have proceeded from a design to injure your character, I never read them. I know nothing of your parentage, your education, or condition of life. You may have been elevated, by your birth, above the necessity of acquiring the means of sustaining life by the

labor of either hand or head ; if this be the case, you ought not to despise those who have come into the world in less favorable circumstances. If your origin has been less fortunate, you must have supported yourself, either by manual labor, or the exercise of your genius. Why should you think that conduct disreputable in priests, which you probably consider as laudable in yourself? I know not whether you have not as great a dislike of kings as of priests ; but that you may be induced to think more favorably of men of my profession, I will just mention to you that the payment of tithes is no new institution, but that they were paid in the most ancient times, not to priests only but to kings. I could give an hundred instances of this : two may be sufficient. *Abraham* paid tithes to the king of Salem, four hundred years before the law of Moses was given. The king of Salem was priest also of the most high God. Priests, you see, existed in the world, and were held in high estimation, for kings were priests, long before the impostures, as you esteem them, of the Jewish and Christian dispensations were heard of. But as this instance is taken from a book which you call "A book of contradictions and lies"—the Bible—I will give you another, from a book, to the authority of which, as it is written by a profane author, you probably will not object. *Diogenes Laertius*, in his life of *Solon*, cites a letter of *Pisistratus* to that lawgiver, in which he says—"I Pisistratus, the Tyrant, am contented with the stipends which were paid to those who reigned before me ; the people of Athens set apart a tenth of the fruits of their land, not for my private use, but to be expended in the public sacrifices, and for the general good."

LETTER III.

HAVING done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moses was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your historical and chronological evidence, and you begin with Genesis. Your first argument is taken from the single word—*Dan*—being found in Genesis, when it appears from the book of Judges, that the town *Laish* was not called *Dan*, till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moses ; therefore the writer of Genesis, you conclude, must have lived after the town of *Laish* had the name of *Dan* given it. Lest this objection should not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illustrate in the following manner—"Havre-de-Grace was called Havre-Marat in 1793—should then any dateless writing be found, in after times, with the name of Havre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written till after the year 1793." This is a wrong conclusion. Suppose some hot republican should at this day publish a new edition of any old history of France, and instead of Havre-de-grace should write Havre-Marat ; and that two or three thousand years hence, a man, like yourself, should, on that account, reject the whole history as spurious, would he be justified in so doing? Would it not be reasonable to tell him—that the name of Havre-Marat

had been inserted, not by the original author of the history, but by a subsequent editor of it ; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineness of the book, to the testimony of the whole French nation ! This supposition so obviously applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this solution does not please you, I desire it may be proved, that the *Dan* mentioned in Genesis, was the same town as the *Dan*, mentioned in Judges ; I desire, further, to have it proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the name of a town and not of a river. It is merely said—Abraham pursued them, the enemies of Lot, to *Dan*. Now a river was full as likely as a town to stop a pursuit. Lot, we know, was settled in the plain of *Jordan* : and *Jordan*, we know, was composed of the united streams of two rivers, called *Jor* and *Dan*.

Your next difficulty respects it's being said in Genesis—"These are the kings that reigned in *Edom* before there reigned any king over the children of Israel ;—this passage could only have been written, you say (and I think you say rightly) after the first king began to reign over Israel ; so far from being written by Moses, it could not have been written till the time of Saul at the least." I admit this inference, but I deny its application. A small addition to a book does not destroy either the genuineness or the authenticity of the whole book. I am not ignorant of the manner in which commentators have answered this objection of Spinoza, without making the concession which I have made ; but I have no scruple in admitting, that the passage in question, consisting of nine verses, containing the genealogy of some kings of *Edom*, might have been inserted in the book of Genesis, after the book of *Chronicles* (which was called in Greek by a name importing that it contained things left out in other books) was written. The learned have shewn that interpolations have happened to other books ; but these insertions by other hands have never been considered as invalidating the authority of the books.

"Take away from Genesis," you say, "the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the Word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, traditionary or invented absurdities, or of downright lies." What ! Is it a story then, that the world had a beginning, and that the author of it was God ? If you deem this a story, I am not disputing with a deistical philosopher, but with an atheistic madman. Is it a story, that our first parents fell from a paradisiac state—that this earth was destroyed by a deluge—that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark, and that the world has been re-peopled by his descendents ? Look into a book so common that almost every body has it, and so excellent that no person ought to be without it—Grotius on the truth of the Christian religion—and you will there meet with abundant testimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Genesis. The testimony is not that of Jews, Christians and priests ; it is the testimony of the philosophers, historians, and poets of antiquity. The oldest book in the world is Genesis ; and it is remarkable that those books which come nearest to it in age, are those which make either the most distinct mention, or the most evident allusion to the facts related in Genesis concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic mass, the primeval innocence and subsequent fall of man, the longevity

of mankind in the first ages of the world—the depravity of the Antediluvians and the destruction of the world—Read the tenth chapter of Genesis.—It may appear to you to contain nothing but an uninteresting narration of the descendants of *Shem, Ham, and Japheth*; a mere fable, an invented absurdity, a downright lie. No sir, it is one of the most valuable, and the most venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane historians were ignorant of—the origin of Nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation had sprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a grasshopper; another from an oak; another from a mushroom; another from a dragon's tooth; then indeed it would have merited the appellation you, with so much temerity, bestow upon it. Instead of these absurdities, it gives such an account of peopling the earth after the deluge, as no other book in the world ever did give; and the truth of which, all other books in the world which contain any thing on the subject, confirm. The last verse of the chapter says—"These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations; and by these were the nations divided in the earth, after the flood." It would require great learning to trace out precisely, either the actual situation of all the countries in which these founders of empires settled, or to ascertain the extent of their dominions. This however, has been done by various authors, to the satisfaction of all competent judges; so much at least to my satisfaction, that had I no other proof of the authenticity of Genesis, I should consider this as sufficient. But without the aid of learning, any man who can barely read his Bible, and has but heard of such people as the *Assyrians*, the *Elamites*, the *Lydians*, the *Medes*, the *Ionians*, the *Thracians*, will readily acknowledge that they had *Asur*, and *Elam*, and *Lud*, and *Madia*, and *Javan*, and *Tiras*, grandsons of *Noah*, for their respective founders; and knowing this, he will not, I hope, part with his Bible, as a system of fables. I am no enemy to philosophy; but when philosophy would rob me of my Bible, I must say of it, as Cicero said of the twelve tables—This little book alone exceeds the libraries of all the philosophers in the weight of its authority, and in the extent of its utility.

From the abuse of the Bible, you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men who look upon all war (would to God that all men saw it in the same light), with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind with calamities not necessary, shocking to humanity, and repugnant to reason. But is it repugnant to reason that God should, by an express act of his providence, destroy a wicked nation? I am fond of considering the goodness of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind, of considering his justice as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath; but I am persuaded that all his punishments originate in his abhorrence of sin; are calculated to lessen its influence: and are proofs of his goodness; inasmuch as it may not be possible for Omnipotence itself to communicate supreme happiness to the human race, whilst they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin: it has been to others, and it is to ourselves, a benevolent warning. Moses would have been the wretch you represent him, had he acted by his own sh-

thority alone ; but you may as reasonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and massacre to Moses in executing the command of God.

The Midianites, through the counsel of Balaam, and by the vicious instrumentality, of their women, had seduced a part of the Israelites to idolatry ; to the impure worship of their infamous god Baalpeor :—for this offence, twenty-four thousand Israelites had perished in a plague from heaven, and Moses received a command from God “ To smite the Midianites who had beguiled the people.” An army was equipped and sent against Midian. When the army returned victorious, Moses and the princes of the congregation went to meet it ;” and “ Moses was wroth with the officers.” He observed the women captives, and he asked with astonishment, “ Have ye saved all the women alive ? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation.”—He then gave an order that the boys and the women should be put to death, but that the young maidens should be kept alive for themselves. I see nothing in this proceeding, but good policy combined with mercy. The young men might have become dangerous avengers of what they would esteem their country’s wrongs ; the mothers might have again allured the Israelites to love licentious pleasures and the practice of idolatry, and brought another plague upon the congregation ; but the young maidens, not being polluted by the flagitious habits of their mothers, nor likely to create disturbance by rebellion, were kept alive. You give a different turn to the matter ; you say—“ that thirty-two thousand women-children were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses.” Prove this, and I will allow that Moses was the horrid monster you make him—prove this, and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it—“ A book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy”—prove this, or excuse my wrath if I say to you, as Paul said to Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, “ O full of all subtilty, and of all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord ?”—I did not, when I began these letters, think that I should have been moved to this severity of rebuke, by any thing you could have written ; but when so gross a misrepresentation is made of God’s proceedings, coolness would be a crime. The women-children were not reserved for the purposes of debauchery, but of slavery ;—a custom abhorrent from our manners, but every where practiced in former times, and still practiced in countries where the benignity of Christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature. You here admit a part of the account given in the Bible respecting the expedition against Midian to be a true account ; it is not unreasonable to desire that you will admit the whole, or show sufficient reason why you admit one part, and reject the other. I will mention the part to which you have paid no attention. The Israelitish army consisted but of twelve thousand men, a mere handful when opposed to the people of Midian ; yet, when the officers made a muster of their troops after their return from the war, they found that they had not lost a single man ! This circumstance struck them as so decisive an evidence of God’s interposition, that out of the spoils they had taken they offered “ An oblation to the Lord, an atonement for their souls.” Do

but believe what the captains of thousands, and the captains of hundreds, believed at the time when these things happened, and we shall never more hear of your objections to the Bible, from its account of the wars of Moses.

You produce two or three other objections respecting the genuineness of the first five books of the Bible. I cannot stop to notice them : every commentator answers them in a manner suited to the apprehension of even a mere English reader. You calculate to the thousandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of *Og* the king of Basan ; but you do not prove that the bed was too big for the body, or that a Patagonian would have been lost in it. You make no allowance for the size of a royal bed ; nor ever suspect that king *Og* might have been possessed with the same kind of vanity, which occupied the mind of king Alexander, when he ordered his soldiers to enlarge the size of their beds, that they might give the Indians, in succeeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious stature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you speak much in commendation of science. I join with you in every commendation you can give it ; but you speak of it in such a manner as gives room to believe that you are a great proficient in it ; if this be the case, I would recommend a problem to your attention, the solution of which you will readily allow to be far above the powers of a man conversant only, as you represent priests and bishops to be, in *hic, hæc, hoc*. The problem is this—To determine the height to which a human body, preserving its similarity of figure, may be augmented, before it will perish by its own weight. When you have solved this problem, we shall know whether the bed of the king of Basan was too big for any giant ; whether the existence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is in the nature of things impossible. My philosophy teaches me to doubt of many things ; but it does not teach me to reject every testimony which is opposite to my experience : had I been in Shetland, I could, on proper testimony, have believed in the existence of the Linconshire ox, or of the largest dray-horse in London ; though the oxen and horses in Shetland had not been bigger than mastiffs.

LETTER IV.

HAVING finished your objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua ; and from its internal evidence, you endeavor to prove, that this book was not written by Joshua. What then ? What is your conclusion ?—"That it is anonymous and without authority." Stop a little ; your conclusion is not connected with your premises ; your friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it. "Anonymous, and therefore without authority !" I have noticed this solecism before ; but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book stands much in need of it, I will submit to your consideration another observation on the subject. The book called *Fleta* is anonymous ; but it is not on that account without authority. Domesday book is anonymous, and was written above seven hundred years ago ; yet our courts of law do not hold it to be without

authority, as to the facts related in it. Yes, you will say, but this book has been preserved with singular care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the Jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care? Josephus says the contrary: and, in the Bible itself an appeal is made to many books, which have perished; such as the book of Jasher, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural history by Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others which might be mentioned. If any one, having access to the journals of the Lords and Commons, to the books of the treasury, war-office, privy council, and other public documents, should at this day write a history of the reigns of George the first and second, and should publish it without his name, would any man, three or four hundreds or thousands of years hence, question the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole British nation had received it as an authentic book from the time of its first publication to the age in which he lived? This supposition is in point. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the Jewish nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the present day. Dodsley's Annual Register is an anonymous book, we only know the name of its editor; the New Annual Register is an anonymous book; the Reviews are anonymous books; but do we, or will our posterity, esteem those books of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at present, and will be received in after ages, as authoritative records of the civil, and military, and literary history of England and of Europe. So little foundation is there for our being startled by your assertion, "It is anonymous and without authority."

If I am right in this reasoning (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it) all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joshua was not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward; these books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing that there is no positive proof, when or by whom these, and some other books of holy scripture, were written, as to exclude all possibility of doubt and cavil. There is no necessity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and historical difficulties, which others before you have produced, have been answered, and as to the greatest part of them, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you say that "the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this era by many hundred years. It happens, however, that you are probably mistaken as to the fact: a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, has been preserved amongst one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his Euterpe, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says—"They told me that the sun had four times deviated from his course, having twice risen

where he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he uniformly rises. This however had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt; the fruits of the earth and the phenomena of the Nile had always been the same."—(Beloe's Translation.) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun mentioned in scripture; for they were not of that kind which could introduce any change in climates or seasons. You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery;—you may have seen some Jewish Doctors, and some christian commentators, who consider it as such; but improperly, in my opinion. I think it idle, at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he hence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are still retained in their orbits. The machine of the universe is in the hand of God; he can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole of it, with less trouble and less danger of injuring it, than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book says—"Is not this written in the book of Jasher?"—No author in his senses would have appealed, in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact which, though it did exist, was not recorded in it; we may safely therefore conclude, that, at the time the book of Joshua was written; there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun's standing still was recorded in that book. But this observation, you will say, does not prove the fact of the sun's having stood still: I have not produced it as a proof of that fact: but it proves that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact, that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding, as it would have been upon ours, had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Night's Entertainments, as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument against the genuineness of the book of Joshua, from its being said that—"Joshua burned Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation *unto this day*." Joshua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai: and if he wrote his history in the latter part of his life, what absurdity is there in saying, Ai is still in ruins, or Ai is in ruins to this very day? A young man, who had seen the heads of the rebels, in forty-five, when they were first stuck upon the poles at Temple-Bar, might, twenty years afterwards, in attestation of his veracity in speaking of the fact, have justly said—And they are there to this very day. Whoever wrote the gospel of St. Matthew, it was written not many centuries, probably (I had almost said certainly) not a quarter of a century after the death of Jesus; yet the author, speaking of the potter's field which had been purchased by the chief priests with the money they had given to Judas to betray his master, says, that it was therefore called the field of blood *unto this day*; and in another place, he says, that the story of the body of Jesus

being stolen out of the sepulchre was commonly reported among the Jews *until this day*. Moses, in his old age, had made use of a similar expression, when he put the Israelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the Red Sea. "The Lord hath destroyed them unto this day." (Deut. xi. 4.)

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua it is related, that Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Shechem; and there, in the presence of the elders and principal men of Israel, he recapitulated, in a short speech, all that God had done for their nation from the calling of Abraham to that time, when they were settled in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. In finishing his speech, he said to them—"Choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." And the people answered and said, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods." Joshua urged farther, that God would not suffer them to worship other gods in fellowship with him; they answered, that "They would serve the Lord." Joshua then said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." Here was a solemn covenant between Joshua, on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Israel, on their own part. The text then says—"So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem, *and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God.*" Here is a proof of two things—first, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moses, existing a book called the Book of the Law of God; the same, without doubt, which Moses had written, and committed to the custody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witness against them—secondly, that Joshua *wrote* a part at least of his own transactions in that very book, as an addition to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own transactions in any book; but I submit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material transaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua; and that such things as happened after his death, have been inserted in it by others, in order to render the history more complete.

The Book of Joshua, chap. vi. ver. 26, is quoted in the first book of Kings, chap. xvi. 34. "In his (Ahab's) days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho; he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joshua is older than the first book of Kings: but that is not all which may reasonably be inferred, I do not say proved, from this quotation. It may be inferred from the phrase—according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun—that Joshua *wrote down* the word which the Lord had spoken. In Baruch (which though an apocryphal book, is authority for this purpose) there is a similar phrase—as thou spakest by thy servant Moses in the day when thou didst command him *to write thy law*.

I think it unnecessary to make any observations on what you say

relative to the book of Judges ; but I cannot pass unnoticed your censure of the book of Ruth, which you call "an idle bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz ; pretty stuff indeed," you exclaim, "to be called the word of God !"—It seems to me, that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expression—the Word of God—or the divine authority of the scriptures :—I will explain it to you in the words of Dr. Law, late bishop of Carlisle, and in those of St Austin. My first quotation is from bishop Law's Theory of Religion, a book not undeserving your notice. "The true sense then of the *divine authority* of the books of the Old Testament, and which perhaps is enough to denominate them in general *divinely inspired*, seems to be this ; that as in those times God has all along, beside the inspection, or superintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occasions, by giving express commissions to some persons (thence called *prophets*) to declare his will in various manners, and degrees of evidence, as best suited the occasion, time, and nature of the subject ; and in all other cases, left them wholly to themselves : in like manner, he has interposed his more immediate assistance (and notified it to them ; as they did to the world) in the *recording* of these revelations ; so far as that was necessary, amidst the common (but from hence termed *sacred*) history of those times ; and mixed with various other occurrences, in which the historian's own natural qualifications were sufficient to enable him to relate things, with all the accuracy they required." The passage from St. Austin is this—"I am of opinion, that those men to whom the Holy Ghost revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write some things as men with historical diligence, and other things as prophets by divine inspiration ; and that these things are so distinct, that the former may be attributed to themselves as contributing to the increase of knowledge, and the latter to God speaking by them things appertaining to the authority of religion."—Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here inquire ; it is the opinion of many learned men and good Christians : and, if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will see cause, perhaps, to become a Christian yourself ; and you will see cause to consider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors—apparent mistakes or real contradictions as to historical facts—needless repetitions and trifling interpolations—indeed you will see cause to consider all the principal objections of your book to be absolutely without foundation. Receive but the Bible as composed by upright and well informed, though, in some points, fallible men (for I exclude all fallibility when they profess to deliver the Word of God) and you must receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts, the express will of God ; and in other parts, relating to you the ordinary history of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to other historians ; believe them to deliver the Word of God, when they tell you that they do so ; believe, when they relate other things as of themselves and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the best of their knowledge and capacity, and you will be in your belief something very different from a deist ; you may not be allowed to aspire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the divine authority of the Bible ; though you should admit human mistakes and human opinions to exist in some

parts of it. This I take to be the first step towards the removal of the doubts of many sceptical men; and when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God assisting a teachable disposition, and a pious intention, may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth, you do an injury to her character. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years; and being left a widow without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which with her husband and her two sons she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men with their families to America; if, ten years hence, a woman, having lost her husband and her children, should return to France with a daughter-in-law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country girl?—"But she crept slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz." I do not find it so in the history—as a person imploring protection, she laid herself down at the foot of an aged kinsman's bed, and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down. She was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbors a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient manners, will find it an interesting story of a poor young woman, following in a strange land the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes of the mother of her deceased husband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review. You proceed to show that these books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence you conclude without authority. I need not here repeat what I have said upon the fallacy of your conclusion; and as to your proving that the books were not written by Samuel, you might have spared yourself some trouble if you had recollected, that it is generally admitted, that Samuel did not write any part of the second book which bears his name, and only a part of the first. It would, indeed, have been an inquiry not undeserving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the opinion of learned men respecting the authors of the several books of the Bible; you would have found that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own raising, and proving what was generally admitted. Very little certainty, I think, can at this time be obtained on this subject; but that you may have some knowledge of what has been conjectured by men of judgment, I will quote to you a passage from Dr. Hartley's observations on Man. The author himself does not vouch for the truth of his observations, for he begins it with a supposition. "I suppose then, that the Pentateuch consists of the writings of *Moses*, put together by *Samuel* with a very few additions; that the books of Joshua and Judges were, in like manner, collected by him; and the book of Ruth, with the first part of the Book of Samuel, written by him; that the latter part of the first book of Samuel, and the second book, were written by the prophets who succeeded Samuel, suppose *Nathan* and *Gad*; that the books of Kings and Chronicles, are extracts from the records of the succeeding prophets concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables, made by *Ezra*; that the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are collections of like records, some written by *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, and some by their predecessors; that the book of *Esther* was written by some eminent Jew, in or near the times of the transac-

tions there recorded, perhaps *Mordecai*; the book of Job by a Jew, of an uncertain time; the Psalms by *David*, and other pious persons; the books of Proverbs and Canticles by *Solomon*; the book of Ecclesiastes by *Solomon*, or perhaps by a Jew of later times, speaking in his person, but not with an intention to make him pass for the author; the prophecies by the prophets whose name they bear; and the books of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed." I have produced this passage to you not merely to show you that, in a great part of your work, you are attacking what no person is interested in defending; but to convince you, that a wise and good man, and a firm believer in revealed religion, for such was Dr. Hartley, and no priest, did not reject the anonymous books of the Old Testament as books without authority. I shall not trouble either you or myself with any more observations on that head; you may ascribe the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, to what authors you please; I am satisfied with knowing that the annals of the Jewish nation were written in the time of Samuel, and probably in all succeeding times, by men of ability, who lived in or near the times of which they write. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof, not only from the testimony of Josephus, and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Testament itself. I will content myself with citing a few places—"Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer." 1 Chron. xxix. 29. "Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer?" 2 Chron. ix. 29. "Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies?" 2 Chron. xii. 15. "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani." 2 Chron. xx. 34. Is it possible for writers to give a stronger evidence of their veracity, than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their history.

"The two books of Kings," you say, "are little more than a history of assassinations, treachery and war." That the kings of Israel and Judah were many of them very wicked persons, is evident from the history which is given of them in the Bible; but it ought to be remembered, that their wickedness is not to be attributed to their religion; nor were the people of Israel chosen to be the people of God, on account of their wickedness; nor was their being chosen, a cause of it. One may wonder, indeed, that, having experienced so many singular marks of God's goodness towards their nation, they did not at once become, and continue to be (what, however, they have long been,) strenuous advocates for the worship of one only God, the maker of heaven and earth. This was the purpose for which they were chosen, and this purpose has been accomplished. For above three and twenty hundred years, the Jews have uniformly witnessed to all the nations of the earth the unity of God, and his abomination of idolatry. But as you look upon "the appellation of the Jews being God's *chosen* people as a *lie* which the priests and leaders of the Jews had invented to cover the baseness of their own characters, and which Christian priests, sometimes as corrupt,

and often as cruel, have professed to believe," I will plainly state to you the reasons which induce me to believe that it is no *lie*, and I hope they will be such reasons as you will not attribute either to cruelty or corruption.

To any one contemplating the universality of things, and the fabric of nature, this globe of earth, with the men dwelling on its surface will not appear (exclusive of the divinity of their souls) of more importance than a hillock of ants; all of which, some with corn, some with eggs, some without any thing, run hither and thither, bustling about a little heap of dust. This is a thought of the immortal Bacon; and it is admirably fitted to humble the pride of philosophy, attempting to prescribe forms to the proceedings, and bounds to the attributes of God. We may as easily circumscribe infinity, as penetrate the secret purposes of the Almighty. There are but two ways by which I can acquire any knowledge of the Supreme Being—by reason, and by revelation; to you, who reject revelation, there is but one. Now my reason informs me, that God has made a great difference between the kinds of animals, with respect to their capacity of enjoying happiness. Every kind is perfect in its order; but if we compare different kinds together, one will appear to be greatly superior to another. An animal, which has but one sense, has but one source of happiness; but if it be supplied with what is suited to that sense, it enjoys all the happiness of which it is capable, and is in its nature perfect. Other sorts of animals, which have two or three senses, and which have also abundant means of gratifying them, enjoy twice or thrice as much happiness as those do which have but one. In the same sort of animals there is a great difference amongst individuals, one having the senses more perfect, and the body less subject to disease, than another. Hence, if I were to form a judgment of the divine goodness by this use of my reason, I could not but say that it was partial and unequal. "What shall we say then? Is God unjust? God forbid!" His goodness may be unequal, without being imperfect; it must be estimated from the whole and not from a part. Every order of beings is so sufficient for its own happiness, and so conducive at the same time to the happiness of every other, that in one view it seems to be made for itself alone, and in another not for itself but for every other. Could we comprehend the whole of the immense fabric which God hath formed, I am persuaded that we should see nothing but perfection, harmony and beauty, in every part of it; but whilst we dispute about parts we neglect the whole, and discern nothing but supposed anomalies and defects. The maker of a watch, or the builder of a ship, is not to be blamed because a spectator cannot discover either the beauty or the use of the disjointed parts. And shall we dare to accuse God of injustice, for not having distributed the gifts of nature in the same degree to all kinds of animals, when it is probable that this very inequality of distribution may be the means of producing the greatest sum total of happiness to the whole system? In exactly the same manner may we reason concerning the acts of God's especial providence. If we consider any one act, such as that of appointing the Jews to be his peculiar people, as unconnected with every other, it may appear to be a partial display of his goodness; it may excite doubts concerning the wisdom or the benignity of his divine nature. But if we connect the history of the Jews with that of other

nations, from the most remote antiquity to the present time, we shall discover that they were not chosen so much for their own benefit, or on account of their own merit, as for the general benefit of mankind. To the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Grecians, Romans, to all the people of the earth, they were formerly, and they are still to all civilized nations, a beacon set upon a hill, to warn them from idolatry, to light them to the sanctuary of a God, holy, just, and good. Why should we suspect such a dispensation of being a *lie*? when even from the little which we can understand of it, we see that it is founded in wisdom, carried on for the general good, and analogous to all that reason teaches us concerning the nature of God.

Several things you observe are mentioned in the book of the Kings, such as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the ascent of Elijah into heaven, the destruction of the children who mocked Elisha, and the resurrection of a dead man:—these circumstances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I esteem it a very erroneous mode of reasoning, which from the silence of one author concerning a particular circumstance, infers the want of veracity in another who mentions it, and this observation is still more cogent, when applied to a book which is only a supplement to, or abridgment of, other books: and under this description the book of Chronicles has been considered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you say to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future destruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam: The prophecy is thus written, 1 Kings, xiii. 2, "Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah, by name, and upon thee (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places." Here is a clear prophecy; the name, family, and office of a particular person are described in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Christ. About 850 years after the delivery of the prophecy, you will find, by consulting the second book of Kings, (chap. xxiii. 15. 16.) this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation that Genesis was not written till 800 years after Moses, and that it is of the same age, and you may probably think of the same authority, as *Æsop's* fables. You give, what you call the evidence of this, the air of a demonstration—"It has but two stages;—first, the account of the Kings of Edom, mentioned in Genesis, is taken from Chronicles, and therefore the book of Genesis was written after the book of Chronicles:—secondly, the book of Chronicles was not begun to be written till after Zedekiah, in whose time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, 588 years before Christ, and more than 860 after Moses,"—Having answered this objection before, I might be excused taking any more notice of it; but as you build much in this place, upon the strength of your argument, I will show its weakness, when it is properly stated. A few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by Moses: *therefore no part* of Genesis could be written by Moses: a child would deny your *therefore*.—Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by *Moses*, because they speak of kings of Israel, there having been no kings of Israel in the time of Moses; and *therefore* they could not be written by *Samuel*, or by *Solomon*, or any other person who lived after there were kings in Israel, except by the

author of the book Chronicles; this is also an illegitimate inference from your position. Again, a few verses in the book Genesis are, word for word the same as a few verses in the book Chronicles; *therefore* the author of the book of Genesis must have taken them from Chronicles; another lame conclusion. Why might not the author of the book of Chronicles have taken them from Genesis, as he has taken many other genealogies, supposing them to have been inserted in Genesis by Samuel? But where, you may ask, could Samuel or any other person, have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably, in the public records of the nation, which were certainly as open for inspection to Samuel, and the other prophets, as they were to the author of Chronicles. I hold it needless to employ more time on the subject.

LETTER V.

AT length you come to two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Christ; but then you say, "Those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons unless it be to the Jews, as a part of the history of their nation: and there is just as much of the Word of God in those books, as there is in any of the histories of France, or in Rapin's History of England." Here let us stop a moment, and try if from your own concessions it be not possible to confute your argument. Ezra and Nehemiah, you grant, are genuine books—"but they are nothing to us." The very first verse of Ezra says—the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled; is it nothing to us, to know that Jeremiah was a true prophet? Do but grant that the Supreme Being communicated to any of the sons of men a knowledge of future events, so that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know that, five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Genesis, every book the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah, as authentic books, containing the history of the Israelitish nation from Abraham to that very time?—Is it nothing to us to know that the history of the Jews is true?—It is every thing to us; for if that history be not true, Christianity must be false. The Jews are the root, we are the branches "grafted in amongst them;" to whom pertain "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever.—Amen."

The history of the Old Testament has, without doubt, some difficulties in it; but a minute philosopher, who busies himself in searching them out, whilst he neglects to contemplate the harmony of all its parts, the wisdom and goodness of God displayed throughout the whole, ap-

pears to me to be like a purblind man, who, in surveying a picture, objects to the simplicity of the design, and the beauty of the execution, from the asperities he has discovered in the canvas and the coloring. The history of the Old Testament, notwithstanding the real difficulties which occur in it, notwithstanding the scoffs and cavils of unbelievers, appears to me to have such internal evidences of its truth, to be so corroborated by the most ancient profane histories, so confirmed by the present circumstances of the world, that if I were not a Christian, I would become a Jew. You think this history to be a collection of lies, contradictions, and blasphemies : I look upon it to be the oldest, the truest, the most comprehensive, and the most important history in the world. I consider it as giving more satisfactory proofs of the being and attributes of God, of the origin and end of human kind, than ever was attained by the deepest researches of the most enlightened philosophers. The exercise of our reason in the investigation of truths respecting the nature of God, and the future expectations of human kind, is highly useful ; but I hope I shall be pardoned by the metaphysicians in saying that the chief utility of such disquisitions consists in this—that they make us acquainted with the weakness of our intellectual faculties. I do not presume to measure other men by my standard ; you may have clearer notions than I am able to form of the infinity of space ; of the eternity of duration ; of necessary existence ; of the connection between necessary existence and intelligence ; between intelligence and benevolence ; you may see nothing in the universe but organized matter ; or, rejecting a material, you may see nothing but an ideal world. With a mind weary of conjecture, fatigued by doubt, sick of disputation, eager for knowledge, anxious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the best use of my reason in matters of the utmost importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which revealed religion is grounded, and I am convinced of its truth. This examination is a subject within the reach of human capacity : you have come to one conclusion respecting it, I have come to another ; both of us cannot be right ; may God forgive him that is in an error.

You ridicule, in a note, the story of an angel appearing to Joshua. Your mirth you will perceive to be misplaced, when you consider the design of this appearance ; it was to assure Joshua, that the same God who had appeared to Moses ordering him to pull off his shoes, because he stood on holy ground, had now appeared to himself. Was this no encouragement to a man who was about to engage in war with many nations ? Had it no tendency to confirm his faith ? Was it no lesson to him to obey, in all things, the commands of God, and to give the glory of his conquest to the author of them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ? As to your wit about pulling off the shoe, it originates, I think, in your ignorance ; you ought to have known, that this right was an indication of reverence for the Divine presence ; and that the custom of entering barefoot into their temples subsists, in some countries, to this day.

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book : but that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say that in matters of record it is not to be depended on, and as a proof of your assertion, you tell us that the total amount of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars ; and that every child may have an argu-

ment for its infidelity, you display the particulars and show your skill in arithmetic, by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, so little of the lowest branch of science, that he could not give his readers the sum-total of sixty particular sums? You know undoubtedly that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers; and that there were such a similarity between some of these letters that it was extremely easy for a transcriber of a manuscript to mistake a א for a ב (or 2 for 20) a ב for a ג (or 3 for 50) a ד for a ה (or a 5 for 200.) Now what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute them, wherever they occur, to this obvious source of error—the inattention of the transcriber in writing one letter for another that was like it?

I should extend these letters to a length troublesome to the reader, to you, and to myself, if I answered minutely every objection you have made, and rectified every error into which you have fallen; it may be sufficient briefly to notice some of the chief.

The character represented in Job under the name of Satan is, you say, “the first and the only time this name is mentioned in the Bible.” Now I find this name as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Testament; thus 2 Sam. xix. 22, “What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me?” In the original it is *satans* unto me. Again, 1 Kings v. 4, “The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent.”—In the original neither Satan nor evil. I need not mention other places; these are sufficient to show that the word Satan, denoting an adversary, does occur in various places of the Old Testament; and it is extremely probable to me, that the root Satan was introduced in the Hebrew and other eastern languages, to denote an adversary, from its having been the proper name of the great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word *satan* is not older than the Babylonian captivity: this is a mistake, for it is met with in the hundred and ninth psalm, which all allow to have been written by David, long before the captivity.—Now we are upon this subject, permit me to recommend to your consideration the universality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who in the beginning of time had opposed himself, who still continues to oppose himself, to the supreme source of all good. Amongst all nations, in all ages, this opinion prevailed, that human affairs were subject to the will of the gods, and regulated by their interposition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering stars of the Chaldeans, two of them beneficent, and two malignant—hence the Egyptian *Typho* and *Osiris*—the Persian *Arimanius* and *Oromasdes*—the Grecian *celestial* and *infernal Jove*—the *Brama* and the *Zupay* of the Indians, Peruvians, Mexicans,—the good and evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations—and hence the structure of the whole book of Job, in whatever light, of history or drama, it may be considered. Now does it not appear reasonable to suppose, that an opinion so ancient and so universal has arisen from tradition concerning the fall of our first parents; disfigured, indeed, and obscured, as all traditions must be, by many fabulous additions?

The Jews, you tell us, “never prayed but when they were in trouble.” I do not believe this of the Jews: but that they prayed more fervently

when they were in trouble, than at other times, may be true of the Jews, and I apprehend is true of all nations and of all individuals. But, "the Jews never prayed for any thing but victory, vengeance, and riches." Read Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and blush for your assertion—illiberal and uncharitable in the extreme!

It appears, you observe, "to have been the custom of the heathens to personify both virtue and vice, by statues and images, as is done now-a-days both by statuary and painting; but it does not follow from this that they worshipped them any more than we do." Not worshipped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up? Was it not worshipped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire? Not worshipped them! What think you of the decree of the Roman senate for fetching the statue of the mother of the gods from Pessinum? Was it only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanship? Not worshipped them! "What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians was a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" Not worshipped them! The worship was universal. "Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of their high places, which the Samaritans had made—the men of Babylon made Succoth—benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech, and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." (2 Kings, chap. xvii.) The heathens are much indebted to you for this curious apology for their idolatry; for a mode of worship the most cruel, senseless, impure, abominable, that can possibly disgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have saved *Micha's teraphims, the golden calves of Jeroboam, and of Aaron*, and quite superseded the necessity of the second commandment. Heathen morality has had its advocates before you; the facetious gentleman who pulled off his hat to the statue of Jupiter, that he might have a friend when heathen idolatry should again be in repute, seems to have had some foundation for his improper humor, some knowledge that certain men esteeming themselves great philosophers had entered into a conspiracy to abolish Christianity, some foresight of the consequences which will certainly attend their success.

It is an error, you say, to call the Psalms, the Psalms of David.—This error was observed by St. Jerome, many hundred years before you were born; his words are—"We know that they are in error who attribute all the Psalms to David." You I suppose, will not deny, that David wrote some of them. Songs are of various sorts; we have hunting songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, love songs, foolish, wanton, wicked songs; if you will have the "Psalms of David to be nothing but a collection from different song-writers," you must allow that the writers of them were inspired by no ordinary spirit; that it is a collection, incapable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection in matter and in manner. Compare the book of Psalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Callimachus, the golden verses of Pythagoras, the choruses of the Greek tragedians (no contemptible compositions any of those) and you will quickly see how greatly it surpasses them all, in piety of senti-

ment, in sublimity of expression, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

As you esteem the Psalms of David, a song book, it is consistent enough in you to esteem the Proverbs of Solomon, a jest book; there have not come down to us above eight hundred of his jests: if we had the whole three thousand, which he wrote, our mirth would become extreme. Let us open the book, and see what kind of jests it contains: take the very first as a specimen—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction"—Do you perceive any jest in this? The fear of the Lord! What Lord does Solomon mean? He means the Lord who took the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people—who redeemed that people from Egyptian bondage by a miraculous interposition of his power—who gave the law to Moses—who commanded the Israelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan.—Now this Lord you will not fear; the jest says, you despise wisdom and instruction.—Let us try again—"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother."—If your heart has been ever touched by parental feelings you will see no jest in this.—Once more—"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."—These are the three first proverbs in Solomon's "jest book;" if you read it through, it may not make you merry; I hope it will make you wise; that it will teach you, at least, the beginning of wisdom—the fear of that Lord whom Solomon feared. Solomon, you tell us, was witty; jesters are sometimes witty: but though all the world, from the time of the queen of Sheba, has heard of the wisdom of Solomon, his wit was never heard of before. There is a great difference, Mr. Locke teaches us, between wit and judgment, and there is a greater between wit and wisdom. Solomon "was wiser than Ethan the Ezahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol." These men you may think were jesters; and so you may call the seven wise men of Greece; but you will never convince the world that Solomon, who was wiser than them all, was nothing but a witty jester. As to the sins and debaucheries of Solomon, we have nothing to do with them but to avoid them; and to give full credit to his experience, when he preaches to us his admirable sermon on the vanity of every thing but piety and virtue.

Isaiah has a greater share of your abuse than any other writer in the Old Testament, and the reason of it is obvious—the prophecies of Isaiah have received such a full and circumstantial completion, that unless you can persuade yourself to consider the whole book (a few historical sketches excepted) "as one continued bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of meaning," you must of necessity allow its divine authority. You compare the burden of Babylon, the burden of Moab, the burden of Damascus, and the other denunciations of the prophet against cities and kingdoms, to the story "of the knight of the burning mountain, the story of Cinderella, &c." I may have read these stories, but I remember nothing of the subjects of them; I have read also Isaiah's burden of Babylon, and I have compared it with the past and present state of Babylon, and the comparison has made such an impression on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I shall never cease to believe that the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more distinctly known than past or present things are to man, that the Eternal God alone could

have dictated to the prophet Isaiah the subject of the burden of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty-fourth and the beginning of the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, are, in your opinion, so far from being written by Isaiah, that they could only have been written by some person who lived at least an hundred and fifty years after Isaiah was dead. These chapters, you go on, "are a compliment to Cyrus, who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity above an hundred and fifty years after the death of Isaiah?"—and is it for this, sir, that you accuse the church of audacity, and the priests of ignorance, in imposing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writing of Isaiah? What shall be said of you, who, either designedly or ignorantly, represent one of the most clear and important prophecies in the Bible, as an historical compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet?—We contend, sir, that this is a prophecy and not a history; that God called *Cyrus* by his name; declared that he should conquer Babylon; and described the means by which he should do it, above an hundred years before *Cyrus* was born, and when there was no probability of such an event. *Porphry* could not resist the evidence of *Daniel's* prophecies, but by saying, that they were forged after the events predicted had taken place; *Voltaire* could not resist the evidence of the prediction of *Jesus*, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but by saying, that the account was written after Jerusalem had been destroyed; and you, at length (though, for aught I know, you may have had predecessors in this presumption) unable to resist the evidence of *Isaiah's* prophecies, contend that they are bombastical rant, without application, though the application is circumstantial; and destitute of meaning, though the meaning is so obvious that it cannot be mistaken; and that one of the most remarkable of them, is not a prophecy but a historical compliment written after the event. We will not, sir, give up Daniel and St. Matthew, to the impudent assertions of *Porphry* and *Voltaire*, nor will we give up Isaiah to your assertion. Proof, proof is what we require and not assertion; we will not relinquish our religion, in obedience to your abusive assertion respecting the prophets of God. That the wonderful absurdity of this hypothesis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to consider that *Cyrus* was a Persian, had been brought up in the religion of his country, and was probably addicted to the magian superstition of two independent beings, equal in power but different in principle, one the author of light and of all good, the other the author of darkness and all evil. Now is it probable that a captive Jew, meaning to compliment the greatest prince in the world, should be so stupid as to tell the prince his religion was a lie? "I am the Lord, and there is none else, I form the *light*, and create *darkness*, I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things."

But if you will persevere in believing that the prophecy concerning *Cyrus* was written after the event, peruse the burden of Babylon; was that also written after the event? Were the Medes *then* stirred up against Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees, *then* overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it *then* uninhabited? Was it *then* neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the shepherd's fold? Did the wild beasts of the desert *then* lie there? Did the wild beasts of the islands *then* cry in their deso-

late houses, and dragons in their pleasant places? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the son and the grandson, *then* cut off? Was Babylon *then* become a possession of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it *then* swept with the besom of destruction, so swept that the world knows not now where to find it.

I am unwilling to attribute bad designs, deliberate wickedness to you or to any man; I cannot avoid believing, that you think you have truth on your side, and that you are doing service to mankind in endeavoring to root out what you esteem superstition. What I blame you for is this—that you have attempted to lessen the authority of the Bible by ridicule, more than by reason; that you have brought forward every petty objection which your ingenuity could discover, or your industry pick up, from the writings of others; and without taking any notice of the answers which have been repeatedly given to these objections, you urge and enforce them as if they were new.—There is certainly some novelty, at least in your manner, for you go beyond all others in boldness of assertion, and in profaneness of argumentation; Bolingbroke and Voltaire must yield the palm of scurrility to Thomas Paine.

Permit me to state to you, what would in my opinion, have been a better mode of proceeding; better suited to the character of an honest man, sincere in his endeavors to search out truth. Such a man in reading the Bible, would, in the first place, examine whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holiness, truth, justice, goodness; whether it represented him as subject to human infirmities; whether it excluded him from the government of the world, or assigned the origin of it to chance, and an eternal conflict of atoms. Finding nothing of this kind in the Bible (for the destruction of the Canaanites by his express command, I have shown not to be repugnant to his moral justice) he would, in the second place, consider that the Bible being as to many of its parts, a very old book, and written by various authors, and at different and distant periods, there might, probably occur some difficulties and apparent contradictions in the historical part of it; he would endeavor to remove these difficulties, to reconcile these apparent contradictions, by the rules of such sound criticism as he would use in examining the contents of any other book; and if he found that most of them were of a trifling nature, arising from short additions inserted into the text as explanatory and supplemental, or from mistakes and omissions of transcribers, he would infer that all the rest were capable of being accounted for, though he was not able to do it; and he would be the more willing to make this concession, from observing that there ran through the whole book a harmony and connexion, utterly inconsistent with every idea of forgery and deceit. He would then, in the third place, observe, that the miraculous and historical parts of this book were so intermixed, that they could not be separated; and that they must either both be true, or both false; and from finding that the historical part was as well or better authenticated than that of any other history, he would admit the miraculous part; and to confirm himself in this belief, he would advert to the prophecies; well knowing that the prediction of things to come, was as certain a proof of the Divine interposition, as the performance of a miracle could be. If he should find, as he certainly would, that many ancient prophecies had been fulfilled in all their circumstances, and that some were fulfilling at this very day

he would not suffer a few seeming or real difficulties to overbalance the weight of the accumulated evidence for the truth of the Bible. Such, I presume to think, would be a proper conduct in all those who are desirous of forming a rational and impartial judgment on the subject of revealed religion. To return—

As to your observation, that the book of Isaiah is (at least in translation) that kind of composition and false taste, which is properly called prose run mad—I have only to remark, that your taste for Hebrew poetry, even judging of it from translation, would be more correct if you would suffer yourself to be informed on the subject by Bishop Lowth, who tells you in his *Prelections*—"That a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into any other language, whilst the same forms of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification." (*Gregory's Transl.*) If this is what you mean by prose run mad, your observation may be admitted.

You explain at some length your notion of the misapplication made by St. Matthew of the prophecy in Isaiah—"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." That passage has been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one; I am not on the present occasion concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove, and it is the only instance you produce—that Isaiah was "a lying prophet and an imposter." Now I maintain, that this very instance proves that he was a true prophet, and no imposter. The history of the prophecy, as delivered in the seventh chapter, is this—Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Israel, made war upon Ahaz king of Judah; not merely, or, perhaps, not at all, for the sake of plunder or the conquest of territory, but with a declared purpose of making an entire revolution in the government of Judah, of destroying the royal house of David, and of placing another family on the throne. Their purpose is thus expressed—"Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal."—Now what did the Lord commission Isaiah to say to Ahaz? Did he commission him to say, the kings shall not vex thee? No—The kings shall not conquer thee? No:—The kings shall not succeed against thee? No:—he commissioned him to say: "It (the purpose of the two kings) shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." I demand—did it stand, did it come to pass? Was any revolution effected? Was the royal house of David dethroned and destroyed? Was Tabeal ever made king of Judah? No. The prophecy was perfectly accomplished. You say, "Instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz, they succeeded; Ahaz was defeated and destroyed."—I deny the fact; Ahaz was defeated, but was not destroyed; and even the "two hundred thousand women, and sons, and daughters," whom you represent as carried into captivity, were not carried into captivity; they were made captives, but they were not carried into captivity; for the chief men of Samaria, being admonished by a prophet, would not suffer Pekah to bring the captives into the land—"They rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses (some humanity, you see, amongst those Israelites whom you every where represent as barbarous brutes) and brought

them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren." (2 Chron. xxviii. 15.) The kings did fail in their attempt ; their attempt was to destroy the house of David, and to make a revolution ; but they made no revolution ; they did not destroy the house of David, for Ahaz slept with his fathers ; and Hezekiah, his son, of the house of David, reigned in his stead.

LETTER VI.

AFTER what I conceive to be a great misrepresentation of the character and conduct of Jeremiah, you bring forward an objection which Spinoza and others before you had much insisted upon, though it is an objection which neither affects the genuineness, nor the authenticity of the book of Jeremiah, any more than the blunder of a bookbinder, in misplacing the sheets of your performance, would lessen its authority. The objection is, that the book of Jeremiah has been put together in a disordered state. It is acknowledged, that the order of time is not every where observed ; but the cause of the confusion is not known. Some attribute it to *Baruch* collecting into one volume all the several prophecies which Jeremiah had written, and neglecting to put them in their proper places :—others think that the several parts of the work were at first properly arranged, but that through accident, or the carelessness of transcribers, they were deranged : others contend, that there is no confusion ; that prophecy differs from history, in not being subject to an accurate observance of time and order. But leaving this matter to be settled by critical discussion, let us come to a matter of greater importance—to your charge against Jeremiah for his duplicity, and for his false prediction. First, as to his duplicity.

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, had been thrust into a miry dungeon by the princes of Judah who sought his life ; there he would have perished, had not one of the eunuchs taken compassion on him, and petitioned king Zedekiah in his favor, saying, "These men (the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet (no small testimony this, of the probity of the prophet's character,) whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger." On this representation Jeremiah was taken out of the dungeon by an order from the king, who soon afterwards sent privately for him, and desired him to conceal nothing from him, binding himself by an oath, that whatever might be the nature of his prophecy, he would not put him to death, or deliver him into the hands of the princes who sought his life. Jeremiah delivered to him the purpose of God respecting the fate of Jerusalem. The conference being ended, the king anxious to perform his oath, to preserve the life of the prophet, dismissed him, saying, "Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death ; also what the king said unto thee : then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king,

that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded." Thus, you remark, "this man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very strongly prevaricate; for certainly he did not go to Zedekiah to make his supplication, neither did he make it." It is not said that he told the princes he went to make his supplication, but that he presented it: now it is said in the preceding chapter, that he did make the supplication, and it is probable that in this conference he renewed it: but be that as it may, I contend that Jeremiah was not guilty of duplicity, or, in more intelligible terms, that he did not violate any law of Nature, or of civil society, in what he did on this occasion. He told the truth, in part, to save his life; and he was under no obligation to tell the whole to men who were certainly his enemies, and no good subjects to his king, "In a matter (says Puffendorf) which I am not obliged to declare to another, if I cannot, with safety, conceal the whole, I may fairly discover no more than a part." Was Jeremiah under any obligation to declare to the princes what had passed in his conference with the king; You may as well say, that the house of Lords has a right to compel privy counsellors to reveal the king's secrets. The king cannot justly require a privy counsellor to tell a lie for him; but he may require him not to divulge his counsels to those who have no right to know them. Now for the false prediction—I will give the description of it in your own words.

In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah, in these words, ver. 2.—"Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it with fire; and thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but thou shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. *Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah, king of Judah; thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee, and will lament thee, saying, Ah! Lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.*"

"Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burning of odours, as at the funeral of his fathers (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced) the reverse, according to the 52d chapter, was the case; it is there stated, verse 10, 'that the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah: and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.' What can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars?" I can say this, that the prophecy you have produced, was fulfilled in all its parts: and what then shall be said of those who call Jeremiah a liar and an impostor? Here then we are fairly at issue—you affirm that the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. "I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:" so says the prophet; what says the history? "They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the house of God, and

brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the places thereof with fire." (2 Chron. xxxvi 19.) "Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be *taken and delivered* into his hand:" so says the prophet; what says the history?—"The men of war fled by night, and the king went the way towards the plain, and the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him; so they *took* the king and *brought him up to the king of Babylon*, to Riblah." (2 Kings, xxv. 5.) The prophet goes on, "Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth." No pleasant circumstance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon by revolting from him! The history says, "The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah, or, as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, "*Spake judgment with him* at Riblah." The prophet concludes this part with, "And thou shalt go to Babylon;" the history says, "The king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death," Jer. lii. 11.—"Thou shalt not die by the sword." He did not die by the sword, he did not fall in battle. "But thou shalt die in peace." He did die in peace, he neither expired on the rack or on the scaffold; was neither strangled, nor poisoned; no unusual fate of captive kings! He died peaceably in his bed, though that bed was in a prison.—"And with the burnings of thy fathers shall they burn odours for thee." I cannot prove from the history that this part of the prophecy was accomplished, nor can you prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accomplished; and I have two reasons on which I ground this probability. Daniel, Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego, to say nothing of other Jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the imprisonment of Zedekiah; and Daniel continued in power till the subversion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus.—Now it seems to me to be very probable, that Daniel, and the other great men of the Jews, would both have inclination to request, and influence enough with the king of Babylon, to obtain permission to bury their deceased prince Zedekiah, after the manner of his fathers—But if there had been no Jews at Babylon of consequence enough to make such a request, still it is probable that the king of Babylon would have ordered the Jews to bury and lament their departed prince, after the manner of their country. Monarchs, like other men, are conscious of the instability of human condition: and when the pomp of war has ceased, when the insolence of conquest is abated, and the fury of resentment subsided, they seldom fail to reverse royalty even in its ruins, and grant without reluctance proper obsequies to the remains of captive kings.

You profess to have been particular in treating of the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah. Particular! in what? You have particularized two or three passages, which you have endeavoured to represent as objectionable, and which I hope have been shown, to the reader's satisfaction, to be not justly liable to your censure; and you have passed over all the other parts of these books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cause to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many instances of sublime composition; and,

what is of more consequence, with many instances of prophetic veracity. Particularities of these kinds you have wholly overlooked. I cannot account for this ; I have no right, no inclination, to call you a dishonest man ; am I justified in considering you as a man not altogether destitute of ingenuity, but so entirely under the dominion of prejudice, in every thing respecting the Bible, that, like a corrupted judge, previously determined to give sentence on one side, you are negligent in the examination of the truth ?

You proceed to the rest of the prophets, and you take them collectively, carefully however selecting for your observations such peculiarities as are best calculated to render, if possible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers. You confound prophets with poets and musicians : I would distinguish them thus ; many prophets were poets and musicians, but all poets and musicians were not prophets. Prophecies were often delivered in poetic language and measure ; but flights and metaphors of the Jewish poets have not, as you affirm, been foolishly erected into what are now called prophecies ; they are now called, and have always been called, prophecies ; because they were real predictions, some of which have received, some are now receiving, and all will receive, their full accomplishment.

That there were false prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurors, fortune-tellers, among the Jews, no person will attempt to deny ; no nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them ; but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Testament to a level with these conjuring, dreaming, strolling gentry ; when you would represent them as spending their lives in fortune-telling, casting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c. I must be allowed to say, that you wholly mistake their office, and misrepresent their character : their office was to convey to the children of Israel the commands, the promises, the threatenings of Almighty God ; and their character was that of men sustaining, with fortitude, persecution in the discharge of their duty. There were false prophets in abundance amongst the Jews ; and if you oppose these to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty of doing so, but you will not thereby confound the distinction between truth and falsehood. False prophets are spoken of with detestation in many parts of Scripture, particularly by Jeremiah, who accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the Lord, saying, " I have dreamed, I have dreamed : Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith, that prophecy false dreams, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness." Jeremiah cautions his countrymen against giving credit to their prophets, to their diviners, to their dreamers, to their enchanter, to their sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying ; " Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon." You cannot think more contemptibly of these gentry than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived ; but, as Jeremiah says on this subject, " what is the chaff to the wheat ?" what are the false prophets to the true ones ? Every thing good is liable to abuse ; but who argues against the use of a thing from the abuse of it ? against physicians, because there are pretenders to physic ? Was Isaiah a fortune-teller, predicting riches, when he said to king Hezekiah, " Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers

have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Fortune-tellers generally predict good luck to their simple customers, that they may make something by their trade; but Isaiah predicts to a monarch desolation of his country, and ruin of his family. This prophecy was spoken in the year before Christ, 718; and, above a hundred years afterwards, it was accomplished; when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house (2 Kings xxiv. 13), and when he commanded the master of his eunuchs (Dan. i. 3), that he should take certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes, and educate them for three years, till they were able to stand before the king.

Jehoram king of Israel, Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to make war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or cattle. In this distress they waited upon Elisha (a high honor for one of your conjurers), by the advice of Jehoshaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet, on seeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from the worship of the true God, come to consult him, said to him, "Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother." This you think shows Elisha to have been a party prophet, full of venom and vulgarity; it shows him to have been a man of great courage, who respected the dignity of his own character, the sacredness of his office as a prophet of God, whose duty it was to reprove the wickedness of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were full of ditches. This, you say, "every countryman could have told, that the way to get water was to dig for it." But this is not a true representation of the case: the ditches were not dug that water might be gotten by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it should miraculously come "without wind or rain," from another country; and it did come, "from the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." As to Elisha's cursing the little children who had mocked him, and their destruction in consequence of his imprecation, the whole story must be taken together. The provocation he received, is by some, considered as an insult offered to him, not as a man, but as a prophet, and that the persons who offered it were not what we understand by little children, but grown up youths; the term child being applied, in the Hebrew language, to grown up persons. Be this as it may, the cursing was the act of the prophet; had it been a sin, it would not have been followed by a miraculous destruction of the offenders; for this was the act of God, who best knows who deserve punishment. What effect such a signal judgment had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, is nowhere said; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity; you allow their writings to be genuine. In this you differ from some of the greatest adversaries of Christianity: and in my opinion cut up, by this concession, the very root of your whole performance. It is next to an impossibility for any man, who admits the book of Daniel to be a genuine book, and who examines that book with intelligence and impartiality,

to refuse his assent to the truth of Christianity. As to your saying, that the interpretations which commentators and priests have made of these books, only show the fraud, or the extreme folly, to which credulity and priestcraft can go, I consider it as nothing but a proof of the extreme folly or fraud to which prejudice and infidelity can carry a minute philosopher. You profess a fondness for science; I will refer you to a scientific man, who was neither a commentator nor a priest—to Ferguson. In a tract entitled—*The Year of our Saviour's Crucifixion ascertained*; and the darkness, at the time of his crucifixion, proved to be supernatural—this real philosopher interprets the remarkable prophecy in the 9th chapter of Daniel, and concludes his dissertation in the following words—"Thus we have an astronomical demonstration of the truth of this ancient prophecy, seeing that the prophetic year of the Messiah's being cut off, was the very same with the astronomical." I have somewhere read an account of a solemn disputation which was held at Venice, in the last century, between a Jew and a Christian:—the Christian strongly argued from Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks, that Jesus was the Messiah whom the Jews had long expected, from the predictions of their prophets; the learned Rabbi, who presided at this disputation, was so forcibly struck by the argument, that he put an end to the business by saying, "Let us shut up our Bibles; for if we proceed in the examination of this prophecy, it will make us all become Christians." Was it a similar apprehension which deterred you from so much as opening the book of Daniel? You have not produced from it one exceptionable passage. I hope you will read that book with attention, with intelligence, and with an unbiassed mind follow the advice of our Saviour when he quoted this prophecy—"Let him that readeth understand"—and I shall not despair of your conversion from deism to Christianity.

In order to discredit the authority of the books which you allow to be genuine, you form a strange and prodigious hypothesis concerning Ezekiel and Daniel, for which there is no manner of foundation either in history or probability. You suppose these two men to have had no dreams, no visions, no revelations from God Almighty; but to have pretended to these things; and, under that disguise to have carried on an enigmatical correspondence relative to the recovery of their country from the Babylonian yoke. That any man in his senses should frame or adopt such an hypothesis, should have so little regard to his own reputation as an impartial inquirer after truth, so little respect for the understanding of his readers, as to obtrude it on the world, would have appeared an incredible circumstance, had not you made it a fact.

You quote a passage from Ezekiel; in the 29th chapter, ver. 11, speaking of Egypt, it is said—"No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years:"—this, you say, "never came to pass, and consequently it is false, as all the books I have already reviewed are." Now that this did come to pass, we have, as Bishop Newton observes, "the testimonies of Megasthenes and Berosus, two heathen historians, who lived about 300 years before Christ; one of whom affirms, expressly, that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greater part of Africa; and the other affirms it, in effect, in saying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having settled his affairs in *Egypt*, and committed the

captives whom he took in Egypt to the care of some of his friends, to bring them after him, he hasted directly to Babylon." And if we had been possessed of no testimony in support of the prophecy, it would have been a hasty conclusion, that the prophecy never came to pass; the history of Egypt, at so remote a period, being no where accurately and circumstantially related. I admit that no period can be pointed out from the age of Ezekiel to the present, in which there was no foot of man or beast to be seen for forty years in all Egypt; but some think that only a part of Egypt is here spoken of; and surely you do not expect a literal accomplishment of a hyperbolical expression, denoting great desolation; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at present, by caravans, by the foot of man and beast, should be annihilated. Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little further into the book from which you have made your quotation, you would have there seen a prophecy delivered above two thousand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this:—"Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations—there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt." This you may call a dream, a vision, a lie: I esteem it a wonderful prophecy; for "as is the prophecy, so has been the event. Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians by the Persians; and after the Persians it became subject to the Macedonians; and after the Macedonians to the Romans; and after the Romans to the Saracens; and then to the Mamelukes; and is now a province of the Turkish empire."

Suffer me to produce to you from this author not an enigmatical letter to Daniel respecting the recovery of Jerusalem from the hands of the king of Babylon, but an enigmatical prophecy concerning Zedekiah the king of Jerusalem, before it was taken by the Chaldeans—"I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there." How! not see Babylon, when he should die there? How, moreover, is this consistent, you may ask, with what Jeremiah had foretold—that Zedekiah should see the eyes of the king of Babylon?—This darkness of expression, and apparent contradiction between the two prophets, induced Zedekiah (as Josephus informs us) to give no credit to either of them; yet he unhappily experienced, and the fact is worthy your observation, the truth of them both. He saw the eyes of the king of Babylon, not at Babylon, but at Riblah; his eyes were there put out; and he was carried to Babylon, yet he saw it not; and thus were the predictions of both the prophets verified, and the enigma of Ezekiel explained.

As to your wonderful discovery that the prophecy of Jonah is a book of some Gentile, "and that it has been written as a fable, to expose the nonsense, and to satirize the vicious and malignant character of a Bible prophet, or a predicting priest," I shall put it, covered with *Hel-lebore*, for the service of its author, on the same shelf with your hypothesis concerning the conspiracy of Daniel and Ezekiel, and shall not say another word about it.

You conclude your objections to the Old Testament in a triumphant style; an angry opponent would say, in a style of extreme arrogance, and sottish self-sufficiency, "I have gone," you say, "through the Bible (mistaking here, as in other places, the Old Testament for the

Bible) as a man would go through a wood, with an axe on his shoulders, and fell trees ; here they lie ; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never grow." And is it possible that you should think so highly of your performance, as to believe, that you have thereby demolished the authority of a book which Newton himself esteemed the most authentic of all histories : which, by its celestial light illumines the darkest ages of antiquity ; which is the touchstone whereby we are enabled to distinguish between true and fabulous theology, between the God of Israel, holy, just, and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Baalim ; which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philosophy of Plato ; Which has been illustrated by the labor of learning, in all ages and countries ; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its sublimity, its veracity, by all who were able to read and understand it? No, Sir ; you have gone indeed through the wood, with the best intention in the world to cut it down ; but you have merely busied yourself in exposing to vulgar contempt a few unsightly shrubs, which good men had wisely concealed from public view ; you have entangled yourself in thickets of thorns and briars ; you have lost your way on the mountains of Lebanon ; the goodly cedar trees whereof, lamenting the madness, and pitying the blindness of your rage against them, have scorned the blunt edge and the base temper of your axe, and laughed unhurt at the feebleness of your strokes.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Testament hunting after difficulties ; and you have found some real ones ; these you have endeavored to magnify into insurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is considered that the Old Testament is composed of several books, written by different authors and at different periods, from Moses to Malachi, comprising an abstracted history of a particular nation for above a thousand years, I think the real difficulties which occur in it are much fewer, and of much less importance, than could reasonably have been expected. Apparent difficulties you have represented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held most sacred and calumniated characters esteemed most venerable : you have excited the scoffs of the profane ; increased the scepticism of the doubtful ; shaken the faith of the unlearned ; suggested cavils to the "disputers of this world ;" and perplexed the minds of honest men who wish to worship the God of their fathers in sincerity and truth. This and more you have done in going through the Old Testament : but you have not so much as glanced at the great design of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependance of the several parts. You have said nothing of the wisdom of God in selecting a particular people from the rest of mankind, not for their own sakes, but that they might witness to the whole world in successive ages, his existence and attributes : that they might be an instrument of subverting idolatry ; and of declaring the name of the God of Israel throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians saw the wonders of God ; that the Canaanites (whom wickedness had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments ; that the Babylonians issued their decrees—"That none should dare to speak amiss of the God of Israel—that all should fear

and tremble before him;"—and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worshippers of idols. You have said nothing of the goodness of God in promising, that through the seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; that the desire of all nations, the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles, should come. You have passed by all the prophecies respecting the coming of the Messiah: though they absolutely fix the time of his coming, and of his being cut off; described his office, character, condition, sufferings, and death, in so circumstantial a manner, that we cannot but be astonished at the accuracy of their completion in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. You have neglected noticing the testimony of the whole Jewish nation to the truth both of the natural and miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament. That we may better judge of the weight of this testimony, let us suppose that God should now manifest himself to us, as we contend he did to the Israelites in Egypt, in the desert, and in the land of Canaan; and that he should continue these manifestations of himself to our posterity for a thousand years or more, punishing or rewarding them according as they disobeyed or obeyed his commands; what would you expect would be the issue? You would expect that our posterity would, in a remote period of time, adhere to their God, and maintain against all opponents the truth of the books in which the dispensations of God to us and to our successors had been recorded. They would not yield to the objections of men, who, not having experienced the same divine government, should, for want of such experience refuse assent to their testimony. No: they would be to the then surrounding nations, what the Jews are to us, witnesses of the existence and of the moral government of God.

LETTER VII.

"THE NEW Testament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old; if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation." Thus you open your attack upon the New Testament; and I agree with you, that the New Testament must follow the fate of the Old; and that fate is to remain unimpaired by such efforts as you have made against it. The New Testament, however, is not founded solely on the prophecies of the Old. If a heathen from Athens or Rome, who had never heard of the prophecies of the old Testament, had been an eye-witness of the miracles of Jesus, he would have made the same conclusion that the Jew Nicodemus did: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Our Saviour tells the Jews, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me;" and he bids them search the Scriptures, for they testified of him. But notwithstanding this appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus said to the Jews, "Though ye believe not me, believe the works"—"believe me for the very works' sake"—"If I had not done among them the

works which none other man did, they had not had sin." These are sufficient proofs, that the truth of Christ's mission was not even to the Jews, much less to the Gentiles, founded solely on the truth of the prophecies of the Old Testament. So that if you could prove some of these prophecies to have been misapplied, and not completed in the person of Jesus, the truth of the Christian religion would not thereby be overturned. That Jesus of Nazereth was the person, in whom all the prophecies, direct and typical, in the Old Testament, respecting the Messiah, were fulfilled, is a proposition founded on those prophecies, and to be proved by comparing them with the history of his life. That Jesus was *a* prophet sent from God, is one proposition; that Jesus was *the* prophet, the Messiah, is another; and though he certainly was both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of these propositions are separate and distinct.

The mere existence "of such a woman as Mary, and of such a man as Joseph, and Jesus," is, you say, a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or to disbelieve. Belief is different from knowledge, with which you here seem to confound it. We know that the whole is greater than its parts—and we know that all the angles in the same segment of a circle are equal to each other—we have intuition and demonstration as grounds of this knowledge; but is there no ground for belief of past or future existence? Is there no ground for believing that the sun will exist to-morrow, and that your father existed before you? You condescend, however, to think it probable that there were such persons as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus; and without troubling yourself about their existence or non existence, assuming, as it were, for the sake of argument, but without positively granting their existence, you proceed to inform us, "that it is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon," against which you contend. You will not repute it a fable, that there was such a man as Jesus Christ; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago; that he went about doing good, and preaching, not only in the villages of Gallilee, but in the city of Jerusalem; that he had several followers, who constantly attended him; that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate; that his disciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome, the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire: that a particular day has been observed in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or supposed resurrection; and that the constant celebration of baptism, and of the Lord's supper, may be traced back from the present time to him, as the author of those institutions. These things constitute, I suppose, no part of your fable; and if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials, which will require great fertility of invention, before you will dress them up into any form which will not disgust even a superficial observer.

The miraculous conception you esteem a fable, and in your mind it is an obscene fable. Impure, indeed, must that man's imagination be, who can discover any obscenity in the angel's declaration to Mary. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore that Holy thing which shall be born of thee

shall be called the Son of God." I wonder you do not find obscenity in Genesis, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confusion, a world out of chaos, by his fostering influence. As to the Christian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the assertion; there would have been some for saying, that much of the heathen mythology was built upon the events recorded in the Old Testament.

You come now to a demonstration, or, which amounts to the same thing, to a proposition which cannot, you say, be controverted. First, "That the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree, and the whole may be false. Secondly, That the *disagreement* of the parts of a story, proves that the *whole cannot be true*. The agreement does not prove truth, but the disagreement proves falsehood positively." Great use, I perceive, is to be made of this proposition. You will pardon my unskilfulness, in dialectics, if I presume to controvert the truth of this abstract proposition, as applied to any purpose in life. The agreement of the parts of a story implies that the story has been told by, at least, two persons (the life of Doctor Johnson, for instance, by Sir John Hawkins and Mr. Boswell). Now I think it scarcely possible for even two persons, and the difficulty is increased if there are more than two, to write the history of the life of any one of their acquaintance, without there being a considerable difference between them, with respect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other; some things will be briefly touched by one, and the same things will be circumstantially detailed by the other; the same things which are mentioned in the same way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the same point of time, with other possible and probable differences. But these real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a fable. If several independent witnesses, of fair character, should agree in all the parts of a story (in testifying, for instance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual) every court of justice in the world would admit the fact, notwithstanding the abstract possibility, of the whole being false:—again, if several honest men should agree in saying, that they saw the king of France beheaded, though they should disagree as to the figure of the guillotine or the size of his executioner, as to the king's hands being bound or loose, as to his being composed or agitated in ascending the scaffold, yet every court of justice in the world would think, that such difference, respecting the circumstances of the fact, did not invalidate the evidence respecting the fact itself.—When you speak of the whole of a story, you cannot mean every particular circumstance connected with the story, but not essential to it; you must mean the pith and marrow of the story; for it would be impossible to establish the truth of any fact (of Admirals Byng or Keppel, for example, having neglected or not neglected their duty) if a disagreement in the evidence of witnesses, in minute points, should be considered as annihilating the weight of their evidence in points of importance. In a word, the relation of a fact differs essentially from the demonstration of a theorem. If one step is left out, one link in the chain of ideas con-

stituting a demonstration is omitted, the conclusion will be destroyed ; but a fact may be established, notwithstanding the disagreement of the witnesses in certain trifling particulars of their evidence respecting it.

You apply your incontrovertible proposition to the genealogies of Christ given by Matthew and Luke—there is a disagreement between them ; therefore, you say, “ If Matthew speak truth, Luke speaks falsehood ; and if Luke speak truth, Matthew speaks falsehood ; and thence there is no authority for believing either ; and if they cannot be believed even in the very first thing they say and set out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed in any thing they say afterwards.” I cannot admit either your premises or your conclusion—not your conclusion ; because two authors, who differ in tracing back the pedigree of an individual for above a thousand years, cannot, on that account, be esteemed incompetent to bear testimony to the transactions of his life, unless an intention to falsify could be proved against them. If two Welsh historians should at this time write the life of any remarkable man of their country, who had been dead twenty or thirty years, and should, through different branches of their genealogical tree, carry up the pedigree to *Cadwallon*, would they, on account of that difference, be discredited in every thing they said ? Might it not be believed that they gave the pedigree as they had found it recorded in different instruments, but without the least intention to write a falsehood—I cannot admit your premises ; because Matthew speaks truth, and Luke speaks truth, though they do not speak the same truth ; Matthew giving the genealogy of Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, and Luke giving the genealogy of Mary, the real mother of Jesus. If you will not admit this, other explanations of the difficulty might be given ; but I hold it sufficient to say, that the authors had no design to deceive the reader, that they took their accounts from the public registers, which were carefully kept, and that had they been fabricators of these genealogies, they would have been exposed at the time to instant detection ; and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impose a false genealogy on the Jewish nation.

But that you may effectually overthrow the credit of these genealogies, you make the following calculation : “ From the birth of David to the birth of Christ is upwards of 1080 years ; and as there were but 27 full generations, to find the average age of each person mentioned in St. Matthew's list at the time his first son was born, it is only necessary to divide 1080 by 27, which gives 40 years for each person. As the life time of man was then but of the same extent it is now, it is an absurdity to suppose, that 27 generations should all be old bachelors before they married. So far from this genealogy being a solemn truth, it is not even a reasonable lie.” This argument assumes the appearance of arithmetical accuracy, and the conclusion is in a style which even its truth would not excuse ; yet the argument is good for nothing, and the conclusion is not true. You have read the Bible with some attention ; and you are extremely liberal in imputing to it lies and absurdities : read it over again, especially the books of the Chronicles, and you will there find, that, in the genealogical list of St. Matthew, three generations are omitted between Joram and Ozias ; Joram was the father of Azariah, Azariah of Joash, Joash of Amaziah, and Amaziah of Ozias. I inquire not, in this place, whence this omission proceeded ; whether it is to be attri-

buted to an error in the genealogical tables from whence Matthew took his account, or to a corruption of the text of the evangelist; still it is an omission. Now if you will add these three generations to the twenty-seven you mention, and divide one thousand and eighty by thirty, you will find the average age when these Jews had each of them their first son born was thirty-six. They married sooner than they ought to have done, according to Aristotle, who fixes thirty-seven as the most proper age, when a man should marry. Nor was it necessary that they should have been old bachelors, though each of them had not a son to succeed him till he was thirty-six; they might have been married at twenty, without having a son till they were forty. You assume in your argument, that the first born son succeeded the father in the list; this is not true. Solomon succeeded David; yet David had at least six sons, who were grown to manhood before Solomon was born; and Rehoboam had, at least, three sons before he had Abia (Abijah) who succeeded him. It is needless to cite more instances to this purpose; but from these, and other circumstances which might be insisted upon, I can see no ground for believing, that the genealogy of Jesus Christ, mentioned by St. Matthew, is not a solemn truth.

You insist much upon some things being mentioned by one evangelist, which are not mentioned by all or by any of the others; and you take this to be a reason why we should consider the Gospels, not as the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but as the productions of some *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend. I do not admit the truth of this supposition; but I may be allowed to use it as an argument against yourself—it removes every possible suspicion of fraud and imposture, and confirms the Gospel history in the strongest manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jesus; from whatever source they derived their materials, it is evident that they agree in a great many particulars of the last importance, such as the purity of his manners; the sanctity of his doctrines; the multitude and publicity of his miracles; the persecuting spirit of his enemies; the manner of his death; and the certainty of his resurrection; and whilst they agree in these great points, their disagreement in points of little consequence, is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falsehood, of their several accounts. Had they agreed in nothing, their testimony ought to have been rejected as a legendary tale; had they agreed in every thing, it might have been suspected, that instead of unconnected individuals, they were a set of impostors. The manner, in which the evangelists have recorded the particulars of the life of Jesus, is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our highest assent to its truth; notwithstanding the force of your incontrovertible proposition.

As an instance of contradiction between the evangelists, you tell us, that Matthew says, the angel announcing the immaculate conception appeared unto Joseph; but Luke says, he appeared unto Mary. The angel, sir, appeared to them both; to Mary, when he informed her that she should, by the power of God, conceive a son; to Joseph, some months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was visible; in the interim she had paid a visit of three months to her cousin Elizabeth. It might have been expected, that, from the accuracy with which you have read your Bible, you could not have confounded these obviously distinct

appearances ; but men, even of candor, are liable to mistakes. Who, you ask, would now believe a girl, who should say that she was gotten with child by a ghost ?—Who, but yourself, would ever have asked a question so abominably indecent and profane ? I cannot argue with you on this subject. You will never persuade the world, that the Holy Spirit of God has any resemblance to the stage ghosts in Hamlet or Macbeth, from which you seem to have derived your idea of it.

The story of the massacre of the young children by the order of Herod, is mentioned only by Matthew ; and therefore you think it is a lie. We must give up all history if we refuse to admit facts recorded by only one historian. Matthew addressed his Gospel to the Jews, and put them in mind of a circumstance, of which they must have had a melancholy remembrance ; but Gentile converts were less interested in that event. The evangelists were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jesus ; it is no wonder then that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an instance of his cruelty, which was not essentially connected with their subject. The massacre, however, was probably known even at Rome ; and it was certainly correspondent to the character of Herod. John, you say, at the time of the massacre “was under two years of age, and yet he escaped ; so that the story circumstantially belies itself.” John was six months older than Jesus ; and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended ; it probably reached no farther than to those who had completed their first year, without including those who had entered upon their second : but without insisting upon this, still I contend that you cannot prove John to have been under two years of age at the time of the massacre ; and I could give many probable reasons to the contrary. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end of answering, at length, all your little objections.

No two of the evangelists, you observe, agree in reciting, *exactly in the same words*, the written inscription which was put over Christ when he was crucified. I admit that there is an unessential verbal difference ; and are you certain that there was not a verbal difference in the inscriptions themselves ? One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin ; and though they had all the same meaning, yet it is probable, that if two men had translated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their translations. You have rendered yourself famous by writing a book called, *The Rights of Man* : had you been guillotined by Robespierre, with this title, written in French, English, and German, and affixed to the guillotine, “Thomas Paine, of America, author of the *Rights of Man* ;” and had four persons, some of whom had seen the execution, and the rest had heard of it from eye-witnesses, written short accounts of your life twenty years or more after your death, and one had said the inscription was, “This is Thomas Paine, the author of the *Rights of Man* ;” another, “The author of the *Rights of Man* ;” a third, “This is the author of the *Rights of Man* ;” and a fourth, “Thomas Paine, of America, the Author of the *Rights of Man* ;” would any man of common sense have doubted, on account of this disagreement, the veracity of the authors in writing your life ? “The only one,” you tell us, “of the men called apostles, who appears to have been near the spot where Jesus was crucified, was Peter.” This your

assertion is not true; we do not know that Peter was present at the crucifixion; but we do know that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was present; for Jesus spoke to him from the cross. You go on, "But why should we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in swearing that he knew not Jesus?" I will tell you why; because Peter sincerely repented of the wickedness into which he had been betrayed, through fear for his life, and suffered martyrdom in attestation of the truth of the Christian religion.

But the evangelists disagree, you say, not only as to the superscription on the cross, but as to the time of the crucifixion, "Mark saying it was at the third hour (nine in the morning), and John at the sixth hour (twelve, as you suppose, at noon.*)" Various solutions have been given of this difficulty, none of which satisfied Doctor Middleton, much less can it be expected that any of them should satisfy you; but there is a solution not noticed by him, in which many judicious men have acquiesced, that, John, writing his Gospel in Asia, used the Roman method of computing time; which was the same as our own; so that by the sixth hour, when Jesus was *condemned*, we are to understand six o'clock in the morning; the intermediate time from six to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this difficulty should be still esteemed insuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain so; and if it should, the main point, the crucifixion of Jesus, will not be affected thereby.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking some circumstances attending the crucifixion, which are so natural, that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was beloved by him with a peculiar degree of affection; and, as kindness produces kindness, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now whom should we expect to be the attendants of Jesus in his last suffering? Whom but John, the friend of his heart?—Whom but his mother, whose soul was now pierced through by the sword of sorrow, which *Simeon* had foretold?—Whom but those, who had been attached to him through life, who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to minister to him of their substance, to be attentive to all his wants? These were the persons whom we should have expected to attend his execution; and these were there. To whom would an expiring son, of the best affections, recommend a poor, and, probably, a widowed mother, but to his warmest friend?—And this did Jesus. Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burden of her sorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and misery, he said to his beloved disciple—"Behold thy mother! and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." I own to you that such instances as these, of the conformity of events to our probable expectation, are to me genuine marks of the simplicity and truth of the Gospels; and far outweigh a thousand little objections, arising from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumstances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means used by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creatures.

St. Matthew mentions several miracles which attended our Saviour's crucifixion—the darkness which overspread the land—the rending of the veil of the temple—an earthquake which rent the rocks—and the resurrection of many saints, and their going into the holy city. "Such," you

say, "is the account which this dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books." This is not accurately expressed; Matthew is supported by Mark and Luke, with respect to two of the miracles—the darkness—and the rending of the veil:—and their omission of the others does not prove, that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them. I think it idle to pretend to say positively what influenced them to mention only two miracles: they probably thought them sufficient to convince any person, as they convinced the centurion, that Jesus "was a righteous man,—the Son of God." And these two miracles were better calculated to produce general conviction, amongst the persons for whose benefit Mark and Luke wrote their Gospels, than either the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints. The earthquake was, probably, confined to a particular spot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon; and those to whom the saints appeared might, at the time of writing the Gospels of Mark and Luke, have been dead: but the darkness must have been generally known and remembered; and the veil of the temple might still be preserved at the time these authors wrote. As to John not mentioning any of these miracles—it is well known that his Gospel was written as a kind of supplement to the other Gospels; he has therefore omitted many things which the other three evangelists had related, and he has added several things which they had not mentioned; in particular, he has added a circumstance of great importance; he tells us that he saw one of the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus with a spear, and that the blood and water flowed through the wound; and lest any one should doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other evangelists, he asserts it with peculiar earnestness—"And he that saw it, bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." John saw blood and water flowing from the wound; the blood is easily accounted for; but whence came the water? The anatomists tell us—that it came from the *pericardium*;—so consistent is evangelical testimony with the most curious researches into natural science! You amuse yourself with the account of what the Scripture calls *many* saints, and you call an *army* of saints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them. It is very possible that Matthew might have known the fact of their resurrection, without knowing every thing about them; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject; it is enough for me to know that "Christ was the first fruits of them that slept," and "that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth," as those holy men did, who heard the voice of the Son of God at his resurrection, and passed from death to life. If I first indulge myself in being wise above what is written, I must be able to answer many of your inquiries relative to the saints; but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not support the authority of the Scripture by the boldness of conjecture. Whatever difficulty there may be in accounting for the silence of the other evangelists, and of St. Paul also, on this subject, yet there is a greater difficulty in supposing that Matthew did not give a true narration of what **had** happened at the crucifixion. If there had been no supernatural darkness, no earthquake, no rending of the veil of the temple, no graves

opened, no resurrection of holy men, no appearance of them unto many—if none of these things had been true, or rather, if any one of them had been false, what motive could Matthew, writing to the Jews, have had for trumping up such wonderful stories? He wrote, as every man does, with an intention to be believed; and yet every Jew he met would have stared him in the face, and told him that he was a liar and an impostor. What author, who twenty years hence should address to the French nation a history of Louis XVI. would venture to affirm, that when he was beheaded there was darkness for three hours over all France? that there was an earthquake? that rocks were split? graves opened? and dead men brought to life, who appeared to many persons in Paris?—It is quite impossible to suppose, that any one should dare to publish such obvious lies; and I think it equally impossible to suppose that Matthew would have dared to publish his account of what happened at the death of Jesus, had not the account been generally known to be true.

LETTER VIII.

THE “tale of the resurrection,” you say, “follows that of the crucifixion.”—You have accustomed me so much to this kind of language, that when I find you speaking of a tale, I have no doubt of meeting with a truth. From the apparent disagreement in the accounts which the evangelists have given of some circumstances respecting the resurrection, you remark—“If the writers of these books had gone into any court of justice to prove an *alibi* (for it is the nature of an *alibi* that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the absence of a dead body by supernatural means) and have given their evidence in the same contradictory manner, as it is here given, they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have justly deserved it.”—“hard words, or hanging,” it seems, if you had been their judge. Now I maintain, that it is the brevity with which the account of the resurrection is given by all the evangelists, which has occasioned the seeming confusion; and that this confusion would have been cleared up at once, if the witnesses of the resurrection had been examined before any judicature. As we cannot have this *viva voce* examination of all the witnesses, let us call up and question the evangelists as witnesses to a supernatural *alibi*. Did you find the sepulchre of Jesus empty? One of us actually saw it empty, and the rest heard, from eye-witnesses that it was empty. Did you, or any of the followers of Jesus take away the dead body from the sepulchre? All answer, No. Did the soldiers or the Jews, take away the body? No. How are you certain of that? Because we saw the body when it was dead, and saw it afterwards when it was alive. How do you know that what you saw was the body of Jesus? We had been long and intimately acquainted with Jesus, and knew his person perfectly. Were you not affrighted, and mistook a spirit for a body? No; the body had flesh and bones; we are sure that it was the very body which hung upon the cross, for we saw the wound in his side, and the print of the nails in the hands and feet. And all this you are ready

You come to that part of the evidence in those books that respects, you say, "the pretended appearance of Christ after his pretended resurrection;" the writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre, said to the two Marys (chap. xxviii. 7.) "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there shall you see him." The Gospel, sir, was preached to poor and illiterate men: and it is the duty of priests to preach it to them in all its purity: to guard them against the error of mistaken, or the designs of wicked men. You, then, who can read your Bible, turn to this passage, and you will find, that the angel did not say, "Behold, Christ *is gone* before you into Galilee,"—but, "Behold, *he goeth* before you into Galilee." I know not what Bible you made use of in this quotation, none that I have seen render the original word by—he is gone. It might be properly rendered, he will go: and it is literally rendered, he is going. This phrase does not imply an immediate setting out for Galilee; when a man has fixed upon a long journey to London or Bath, it is common enough to say, he is going to London or Bath, though the time of his going may be at some distance. Even your dashing Matthew could not be guilty of such a blunder as to make the angel say, *he is gone*: for he tells us immediately afterwards, that, as the women were departing from the sepulchre to tell his disciples what the angels had said to them, Jesus himself met them. Now how Jesus could be *gone* into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jerusalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuse your introducing the expression—"then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Testament, you would not have found in this place any word answering to *then*: the passage is better translated—and the eleven. Christ had said to his disciples (Matt. xxvi. 32.) "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee:"—and the angel put the women in mind of the very expression and prediction; *he is risen, as he said; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee*. Matthew, intent upon the appearance in Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time he wrote, many living witnesses in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and by this omission, seems to connect the day of the resurrection of Jesus, with that of the departure of the disciples for Galilee. You seem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of solution;—for you say—"It is not possible, unless we admit these disciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples: for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says expressly, and John implies as much, that the meeting was that day in a house at Jerusalem; and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the *eleven* were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew says, the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee, and consequently the evidence given in those books destroy each other." When I was a young man in the university, I was pretty much accustomed to drawing of consequences; but my *Alma Mater* did not suffer me to draw consequences after your manner; she taught me, that a false position must end in an absurd conclusion. I have shown

our position—that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection—to be false, and hence your consequence—that the evidence given in these two books destroy each other—is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered, that the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the passover was eaten, lasted seven days; and that strict observers of the law did not sink themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem, till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon *Luke* as one of the eleven, and in other places you speak of him as an eye-witness of the things he relates; you ought to have known that *Luke* was no apostle; and he tells you himself, in the preface to his Gospel, that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible; if from design (which I am unwilling to suspect,) you are still less fit: in either case it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accuracy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate. “Of the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops and all, the sum total of whose learning,” according to you, “is *a b ab*, and *hic, hæc, hoc*, there is not one amongst them,” you say, “who can write poetry like Homer, or science like Euclid.” If I should admit this (though there are many of them, I doubt not, who understand these authors better than you do,) yet I cannot admit that there is one amongst them, bishops and all, so ignorant as to rank *Luke* the evangelist, among the apostles of Christ. I will not press his point; any man may fall into a mistake, and the consciousness of his infallibility should create in all men a little modesty, a little diffidence, a little caution, before they presume to call the most illustrious characters of antiquity, liars, fools, and knaves.

You want to know why Jesus did not show himself to all the people after the resurrection. This is one of Spinoza’s objections; and it may sound well enough in the mouth of a Jew, wishing to excuse the infidelity of his countrymen: but it is not judiciously adopted by deists of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the use of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them; he gave the Jews opportunities of seeing the miracles of Jesus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They who persevered in their incredulity after the resurrection of Lazarus, would have persevered also after the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jesus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jesus saw no corruption; why should you expect, that they would have believed in Jesus on his own resurrection, when they had not believed in him on the resurrection of Lazarus? When the Pharisees were told of the resurrection of Lazarus, they, together with the chief priests, gathered a council, and said—“What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him:—then from that day forth they took council together to put him to death.” The great men at Jerusalem, you see, admitted that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that Jesus was the Christ:

it only exasperated their malice, and accelerated their purpose of destroying him. Had Jesus shown himself after his resurrection, the chief priests would probably have gathered together another council, have opened it with—What do we? and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, which we have in the New Testament, is far more convincing, than if it had been related that he showed himself to every man in Jerusalem; for then we should have had a suspicion, that the whole story had been fabricated by the Jews.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection; I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen; and for this reason—his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to the matter of fact; for believing that to have been a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, considered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses; and before whom does he make his appeal?—Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character, if he had advanced an untruth. You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had resided at Corinth near two years; that during a part of that time, he had testified to the Jews, that Jesus was the Christ; that, finding the bulk of that nation obstinate in their unbelief, he had turned to the Gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Christ; that he left Corinth, and went to preach the Gospel in other parts; that, about three years after he had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who, after his departure, had been split into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in opposition to Paul. From this account we may be certain, that Paul's letter, and every circumstance in it, would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of Jews; these men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet, in the face of them all, he asserts, "that Jesus Christ was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was afterwards seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive." An appeal to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses, is a pretty strong proof of a fact; but it becomes irresistible, when that appeal is submitted to the judgment of enemies. St. Paul, you must allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an idiot, had he put it in the power of his enemies to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying rascal. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove any such thing; and, therefore, we may safely conclude, that this testimony of Paul to the resurrection of Jesus was true: and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension; upon which, in your opinion, "the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof." I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proved, though Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a Divine mission; and when Jesus gave the apostles a commission to preach the Gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they were endued with power from on high. Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension; and John, you say, has not said a syllable about it. I think otherwise. John has not given an express account of the ascen-

ion, but has certainly said something about it : for he informs us, that Jesus said to Mary—"Touch me not ; for I am not yet *ascended* to my father : but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I *ascend* unto my father and your father, and to my God and your God." This is surely saying something about the ascension ; and if the fact of the ascension is not related by John, or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed that the omission was made, on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known, may be justly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it in the hearing of all the Jews, a very few days after it had happened—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being *by the right hand of God exalted*." Paul bears testimony also to the ascension, when he says, that Jesus was *received up into glory*. As to the difference you contend for, between the account of the ascension, as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist ; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus going with his apostles to Bethany, and blessing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But, omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, "gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John ; and when it is considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books." What am I to say to this ? Am I to say that, in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honest man ? Or, admitting your honesty, am I to say that you are grossly ignorant of the subject ? Let the reader judge—John says that Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them. The same John says, that after *eight days*, he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them. Now, sir, how *apparently three or four days* can be consistent with *really eight days*, I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to place or time—for he says—"After these things, (after the two appearances to the disciples at Jerusalem on the first and on the eighth day after the resurrection) Jesus showed himself again to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias." The sea of Tiberius, I presume you know, was in Galilee : and Galilee, you may know, was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem ; it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day to travel from Jerusalem into Galilee. What, in your own insulting language to the priests, what have you to answer, as to the *same spot Jerusalem*, as to your apparently *three or four days* ? But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his Gospel, and says—"Christ showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,"—instead of *four*, you perceive there was *forty days* between the crucifixion and the ascension. I need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists ; your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the credit due to your assertions, however bold and im-

proper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men ; who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they knew, with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the unbelievers of all times—We have told you the truth ; and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say. Had they been impostors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done ; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

John the Baptist had given his testimony to the truth of our Saviour's mission in the most unequivocal terms ; he afterwards sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him whether he was really the expected Messiah or not. Matthew relates *both* these circumstances ; had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impostor, would he have invalidated John's testimony, by bringing forward his real or apparent doubt ? Impossible ! Matthew, having proved the resurrection of Jesus, tells us, that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and "when they saw him, they worshipped him ; but some doubted." Would an impostor, in the very last place where he mentions the resurrection, and in the conclusion of his book, have suggested such a cavil to unbelievers, as to say—some doubted ? Impossible ! The evangelist has left us to collect the reason why some doubted :—The disciples saw Jesus, at a distance, on the mountain ; and some of them fell down and worshipped him ; whilst others doubted whether the person they saw was really Jesus ; their doubt, however, could not have lasted long, for in the very next verse we are told, that Jesus came and spake unto them.

Great and laudable pains have been taken by many learned men, to harmonize the several accounts given us by the evangelists of the resurrection. It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to Christianity, whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not ; since there is no such discordance in them, as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impartial mind. If any man, in a court of justice, should give positive evidence of a fact, and three others should afterwards be examined, and all of them should confirm the evidence of the first as to the fact, but should apparently differ from him and from each other, by being more or less particular in their accounts of the circumstances attending the fact ; ought we to doubt of the fact, because we could not harmonize the evidence respecting the circumstances relating to it ? The omission of any one circumstance (such as that of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the sepulchre : or that of the angel having, after he had rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, entered into the sepulchre) may render a harmony impossible, without having recourse to supposition to supply the defect. You deists laugh at all such attempts, and call them priestcraft. I think it better then, in arguing with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is,) an irreconcilable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts respecting the life of Jesus, or his resurrection. Be it so ; what then ? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the Gospel history, in any of its essential points ? Certainly, in my opinion, not. As I look upon this to

ral answer to most of your deistical objections, I profess my in saying, that I consider it as a true and sufficient answer; re it to your consideration. I have, purposely, in the whole of sion, been silent as to the inspiration of the evangelists; well that you would have rejected, with scorn, any thing I could on that point: but in disputing with a deist, I do most so- tend, that the Christian religion is true, and worthy of all ac-, whether the evangelists were inspired or not.

evers, in general, wish to conceal their sentiments; they have respect for public opinion; are cautious of affronting the reli- heir country; fearful of undermining the foundations of civil Some few have been more daring, but less judicious; and have liguise, professed their unbelief. But you are the first who re that he was an infidel, concluding your deistical creed with p me God! I pray that God may help you; that he may, be influence of his Holy Spirit, bring you to a right mind; con- to the religion of his Son, whom, out of his abundant love to he sent into the world, that all who believe in him should not ut have everlasting life.

rear, that you think the Christian religion is not true. I give t to your oath; it is an oath in confirmation—of what?—of an

It proves the sincerity of your declaration of your opinion:— opinion, notwithstanding the oath, may be either true or false. ne to produce to you an oath not confirming an opinion, but a is the oath of St. Paul, when he swears to the Galatians, that e told them of his miraculous conversion, he did not tell a lie: e things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie lo but give that credit to Paul which I give to you, do but con- difference between an opinion and a fact, and I shall not de- our becoming a Christian.

, you say, consists in a belief of one God, and an imitation of l character, or the practice of what is called virtue; and in this s religion is concerned) you rest all your hopes. There is in deism but what is in Christianity, but there is much in ity which is not in deism. The Christian has no doubt con- future state; every deist, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on ect overwhelmed with doubts insuperable by human reason. istian has no misgivings as to the pardon of penitent sinners, the intercession of a mediator; the deist is harrassed with nsions, lest the moral justice of God should demand, with e rigor, punishment for transgression. The Christian has no acerning the lawfulness and the efficacy of prayer; the deist is on this point by abstract considerations concerning the good- od, which wants not to be intreated; concerning his foresight, s no need of our information; concerning his immutability, nnot be changed through our supplication. The Christian e providence of God and the liberty of human actions; the nvolved in great difficulties when he undertakes the proof of The Christian has assurance that the Spirit of God will help ities; the deist does not deny the possibility that God may ess to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the s either enlightening the understanding, influencing the will, or the heart.

LETTER IX.

"THOSE," you say, "who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history, may suppose that the book called the New Testament has existed ever since the time of Jesus Christ, but the fact is, historically otherwise; there was no such book as the New Testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived." This paragraph is calculated to mislead common readers; it is necessary to unfold its meaning. The book, called the New Testament, consists of twenty-seven different parts; concerning seven of these, viz: the Epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelations there were at first some doubts; and the question, whether they should be received into the canon, might be decided, as all questions concerning opinions must be, by vote. With respect to the other twenty parts, those who are most acquainted with ecclesiastical history will tell you, as Du Pin does after Eusebious, that they were owned as canonical, at all times, and by all Christians. Whether the council of Laodicea was held before or after that of Nice, is not a settled point; all the books of the New Testament, except the Revelations, are enumerated as canonical in the Constitutions of that council; but it is a great mistake to suppose, that the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were not in *general use* amongst Christians, long before the council of Laodicea was held.—This is not merely my opinion on the subject; it is the opinion of one much better acquainted with ecclesiastical history than I am, and, probably, than you are,—*Mosheim*. "The opinions," says this author, "or rather the conjectures, of the learned, concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us in these latter times. It is however sufficient for us to know, that, before the middle of the second century, the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were read in every Christian society throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears, that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions upon the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves, who lived so long, or by their disciples and successors who were spread abroad through all nations. We are well assured, that the *four Gospels* were collected during the life of St. John, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine apostle. And why may we not suppose, that the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time? What renders this highly probable is, that the most urgent necessity required its being done. For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds, and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons, whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all: productions appeared, which were imposed on the world by fraudulent men as the writings of the holy apostles. These apocryphal and spurious writings must have pro-

duced a sad confusion, and rendered both the history and the doctrine of Christ uncertain, had not the rulers of the church used all possible care and diligence in separating the books that were truly apostolical and divine, from all that spurious trash, and conveying them down to posterity in one volume."

Did you ever read the Apology for the Christians, which Justin Martyr presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the senate and people of Rome? I should sooner expect a fallacy in a petition, which any body of persecuted men, imploring justice, should present to the king and parliament of Great Britain, than in this Apology. Yet in this Apology, which was presented not fifty years after the death of St. John, not only parts of *all the four Gospels are quoted*, but it is expressly said, that on the day called Sunday, a portion of them was read in the public assemblies of the Christians. I forbear pursuing this matter further;—else it might easily be shown, that probably the Gospels, and certainly some of St. Paul's epistles, were known to *Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp*, contemporaries with the apostles. These men could not quote or refer to books which did not exist: and therefore though you could make it out that the book called the New Testament did not formally exist under that title, till 350 years after Christ, yet I hold it to be a certain fact, that all the books of which it is composed were written, and most of them received by all Christians, within a few years after his death.

You raise a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had said, that the son of man should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Are you ignorant then that the Jews used the phrase three days and three nights to denote what we understand by three days? It is said in Genesis, chap. vii. 12. "The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights;" and this is equivalent to the expression (ver. 17.) "And the flood was forty days upon the earth." Instead then of saying three days and three nights, let us simply say—three days—and you will not object to Christ's being three days—Friday, Saturday and Sunday, in the heart of the earth. I do not say that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but a hundred instances might be produced, from writers of all nations, in which a part of a day is spoken of as the whole. Thus much for the defence of the historical part of the New Testament.

You have introduced an account of *Faustus*, as denying the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. Will you permit that great scholar in sacred literature, *Michaelis*, to tell you something about this *Faustus*? "He was ignorant, as were most of the African writers, of the Greek language, and acquainted with the New Testament merely through the channel of the Latin translation: he was not only devoid of a sufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the highest degree. An argument which he brings against the genuineness of the Gospel affords sufficient ground for this assertion; for he contends, that the Gospel of St. Matthew could not have been written by St. Matthew himself, because he is always mentioned in the third person." You know who has argued like *Faustus*, but I did not think myself authorized on that account to call you illiterate in the highest degree; but *Michaelis* makes a still more severe conclusion concerning *Faustus*, and he extends his ob-

servation to every man who argued like him:—"A man capable of such an argument must have been ignorant not only of the Greek writers, the knowledge of which could not have been expected from Faustus, but even of the commentaries of Cæsar. And were it thought improbable that so heavy a charge could be laid with justice on the side of his knowledge, it would fall with double weight on the side of his honesty, and induce us to suppose, that, preferring the art of sophistry to the plainness of truth, he maintained opinions which he believed to be false." (*Marsh's Transl.*) Never more, I think, shall we hear of Moses not being the author of the Pentateuch, on account of its being written in the third person.

Not being able to produce any argument to render questionable either the genuineness or the authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles, you tell us, that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were written, since the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument: he does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and ascension, and he declares that he had not believed them." That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them. The high priest and the senate of the children of Israel did not deny the reality of the miracles which had been wrought by Peter and the apostles; they did not contradict their testimony concerning the resurrection and the ascension; but whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counsel to put the apostles to death: and this was also the temper of Paul; whether he believed or did not believe the story of the resurrection, he was exceedingly mad against the saints. The writer of Paul's Epistles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument; he in many places tells us, that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it: "I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel, which was preached of me, is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul does not pretend to have been a witness of the *story* of the resurrection, but he does much more; he asserts, that he was himself a witness of the resurrection. After enumerating many appearances of Jesus to his disciples, Paul says of himself, "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witness or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been a witness of the resurrection.

The story of his being struck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it, you say, miraculous or extraordinary: you represent him as struck by lightning. It is somewhat extraordinary for a man who is struck by lightning, to have, at the very time, full possession of his understanding; to hear a voice issuing from the lightning, speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into conversation with him. His companions, you say, appear not to have suffered in the same manner: the greater the wonder. If it was a common storm of thunder and lightning which struck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is somewhat extraordinary that he alone should be hurt; and that, notwithstanding his being struck blind by light-

ning, he should in other respects be so little hurt, as to be immediately able to walk into the city of Damascus. So difficult is it to oppose truth by an hypothesis! In the character of Paul you discover a great deal of violence and fanaticism; and such men you observe, are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they teach. Read, Sir, Lord Lyttleton's *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*, and I think you will be convinced of the contrary. That elegant writer thus expresses his opinion on this subject: "Besides all the proofs of the Christian religion, which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connexion it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I think the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, is of itself, a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." I hope this opinion will have some weight with you; it is not the opinion of a lying Bible-prophet, of a stupid evangelist, or of an *a b ab* priest, but of a learned layman, whose illustrious rank received splendor from his talents.

You are displeased with St. Paul "for setting out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body." You know, I presume, that the resurrection of the same body is not, by all, admitted to be a scriptural doctrine. "In the New Testament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the Christian faith), I find our Saviour and the apostles to preach the resurrection of the dead, and the resurrection from the dead, in many places; but I do not remember any place where the resurrection of the same body is so much as mentioned." This observation of Mr. Locke I so far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St. Paul, wherein he sets out to prove the resurrection of the same body. I do not question the possibility of the resurrection of the same body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which some learned men have explained it (somewhat after the way of your vegetative speck in the kernel of a peach); but as you are discrediting St. Paul's doctrine, you ought to show, that what you attempt to discredit is the doctrine of the apostle. As a matter of choice, you had rather have a better body—you will have a better body, "your natural body will be raised a spiritual body, your corruptible will put on incorruption." You are so much out of humor with your present body, that you inform us, every animal in the creation excels us in something. Now I had always thought, that the single circumstance of our having hands, and their having none, gave us an infinite superiority, not only over insects, fishes, snails, and spiders (which you represent as excelling us in locomotive powers), but over all the animals of the creation; and enabled us, in the language of Cicero, describing the manifold utility of our hands, to make as it were a new nature of things. As to what you say about the consciousness of existence being the only conceivable idea of a future life, it proves nothing, either for or against the resurrection of a body, or of the same body; it does not inform us, whether to any or to what substance, material or immaterial, this consciousness is annexed. I leave it however, to others, who do not admit personal identity to consist in consciousness, to dispute with you on this point, and willingly subscribe to the opinion of Mr. Locke, "that nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person."

From a caterpillar's passing into a torpid state resembling death, and afterwards appearing a splendid butterfly, and from the (supposed) consciousness of existence which the animal had in these different states, you ask, Why must I believe, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in me the consciousness of existence hereafter? I do not dislike analogical reasoning, when applied to proper objects and kept within due bounds; but where is it said in Scripture, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in you the consciousness of existence? Those, who admit a conscious state of the soul between death and the resurrection, will contend, that the soul is the substance in which consciousness is continued without interruption: those, who deny the intermediate state of the soul as a state of consciousness, will contend, that consciousness is not destroyed by death, but suspended by it, as it is suspended during a sound sleep, and that it may as easily be restored after death as after sleep, during which the faculties of the soul are not extinct but dormant. Those, who think that the soul is nothing distinct from the compages of the body, not a substance but a mere quality, will maintain, that the consciousness appertaining to every individual person is not lost when the body is destroyed; that it is known to God, and may, at the general resurrection, be annexed to any system of matter he may think fit, or to that particular compage to which it belonged in this life.

In reading your book I have been frequently shocked at the virulence of your zeal, at the indecorum of your abuse in applying vulgar and offensive epithets to men who have been held, and who will long, I trust, continue to be held, in high estimation. I know that the scar of calumny is seldom wholly effaced, it remains long after the wound is healed; and your abuse of holy men and holy things will be remembered, when your arguments against them are refuted and forgotten. Moses you term an arrogant coxcomb, a chief assassin; Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, monsters and impostors; the Jewish kings a parcel of rascals; Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets, liars; and Paul a fool, for having written one of the sublimest compositions, and on the most important subject that ever occupied the mind of man—the lesson in our burial service: this lesson you call a doubtful jargon, as destitute of meaning, as the tolling of the bell at a funeral. Men of low condition! pressed down, as you often are, by calamities generally incident to human nature, and groaning under burthens of misery peculiar to your condition, what thought you when you heard this lesson read at the funeral of your child, your parent, or your friend? Was it mere jargon to you, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of a bell? No. You understood from it, that you would not all sleep, but that you would all be changed, in a moment, at the last trump; you understood from it, that this corruptible must put on incorruption; that this mortal must put on immortality, and that death would be swallowed up in victory; you understood from it, that if (notwithstanding profane attempts to subvert your faith) ye continue steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, your labor will not be in vain.

You seem fond of displaying your skill in science and philosophy; you speak more than once of Euclid; and, in censuring St. Paul, you intimate to us, that when the apostle says—one star differeth from another star in glory—he ought to have said in distance. All men see that

one star differeth from another star in glory or brightness ; but few men *know* that their difference in brightness arises from their difference in distance ; and I beg leave to say, that even you, philosopher as you are, do not *know* it. You make an assumption which you cannot prove—that the stars are *equal* in magnitude, and placed at *different* distances from the earth ;—but you cannot prove that they are not different in magnitude and placed at equal distances, though none of them may be so near to the earth, as to have any sensible annual *parallax*. I beg pardon of my readers for touching upon this subject ; but it really moves one's indignation, to see a smattering in philosophy urged as an argument against the veracity of an apostle. "Little learning is a dangerous thing."

Paul, you say, affects to be a naturalist : and to prove (you might more probably have said illustrate) his system of resurrection from the principles of vegetation—"Thou fool," says he, "that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die ;"—to which one might reply in his own language, and say—"Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die *not*." It may be seen, I think, from this passage, who affects to be a naturalist, to be acquainted with the microscopical discoveries of modern times ; which were probably neither known to Paul, nor to the Corinthians ; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little use in the illustration of the subject of the resurrection. Paul said—that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die :—every husbandman in Corinth, though unable perhaps to define the term death, would understand the apostle's phrase in a popular sense, and agree with him that a grain of wheat must become *rotten* in the ground before it could sprout ; and that, as God raised from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the stem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might also cause a new body to spring up from the rotten carcass in the grave. Doctor Clarke observes, "In like manner, as in every grain of corn there is contained a minute insensible seminal principle, which is itself the entire future blade and ear, and in due season, when all the rest of the grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itself visibly to the eye ; so our present mortal and corruptible body may be but the *exuviae*, as it were, of some hidden and at present insensible principle (possibly the present seat of the soul,) which at the resurrection shall discover itself in its proper form." I do not agree with this great man (for such I esteem him) in this philosophical conjecture ; but the quotation may serve to show you, that the germ does not evolve and unfold itself visibly to the eye till after the rest of the grain is *corrupted* ; that is, in the language and meaning of St. Paul, till it *dies*. Though the authority of Jesus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote to you our Saviour's expression, when he foretels the numerous disciples which his death would produce—"Except a corn of wheat fall unto the ground and *die*, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." You perceive from this, that the Jews thought the death of the grain was necessary to its reproduction :—hence every one may see what little reason you had to object to the apostle's popular illustration of the possibility of a resurrection. Had he known as much as any naturalist in Europe does, of the progress of an animal from one state to another, as from a worm to a butterfly (which you think applies to the case,) I am of opinion he

would not have used that illustration in preference to what he has used, which is obvious and satisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him or not, is, in your judgment, a matter of indifference. So far from being a matter of indifference, I consider the genuineness of St. Paul's epistles to be a matter of the greatest importance; for if the epistles, ascribed to Paul, were written by him (and there is unquestionable proof that they were,) it will be difficult for you, or for any man, upon fair principles of sound reasoning, to deny that the Christian religion is true. The argument is a short one, and obvious to every capacity. It stands thus:—St. Paul wrote several letters to those whom, in different countries, he had converted to the Christian faith: in these letters he affirms two things:—first, that he had wrought miracles in their presence:—secondly, that many of themselves had received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. The persons to whom these letters were addressed must, on reading them, have certainly known, whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie: they must have known, whether they had seen him work miracles; they must have been conscious, whether they themselves did or did not possess any miraculous gifts. Now can you, or can any man, believe, for a moment, that Paul (a man certainly of great abilities) would have written public letters, full of lies, and which could not fail of being discovered to be lies, as soon as his letters were read? Paul could not be guilty of falsehood in these two points, or in either of them; and if either of them be true, the Christian religion is true. Reference to these two points are frequent in St. Paul's epistles: I will mention only a few. In his epistle to the Galatians, he says (chap iii. 2, 5.) "This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit (gifts of the Spirit) by the works of the law? He ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you." To the Thessalonians he says (1 *Thess.* ch. i. 5.) "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost." To the Corinthians he thus expresses himself (1 *Cor.* ii. 4. :) "My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" and he adds the reason for his working miracles—"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which opposed the apostle, have laid hold of this and many similar declarations in his letter, had they been able to have detected any falsehood in them? There is no need to multiply words on so clear a point—the genuineness of Paul's epistles proves their authenticity, independently of every other proof; for it is absurd in the extreme to suppose him, under circumstances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was not true; and if Paul's epistles be both genuine and authentic, the Christian Religion is true.—Think of this argument.

You close your observations in the following manner:—"should the Bible (meaning, as I have before remarked, the Old Testament) and Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occasion."—You look, I think, upon your production with a parents' partial eye, when you speak of it in such a style of self-complacency. The Bible, Sir, has withstood the learning of *Porphry*, and the power of *Julian*, to say nothing of the Manichean *Faustus*—it has resisted the genius of *Bolingbroke*, and the wit of *Voltaire*, to say nothing of the numerous

herd of inferior assailants ; and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adversaries ; you have feathered them with blasphemy and ridicule ; dipped them in your deadliest poison ; aimed them with your utmost skill ; shot them against the shield of faith with your utmost vigor ; but, like the feeble javelin of aged Priam, they will scarcely reach the mark, and will fall to the ground without a stroke.

LETTER X.

THE remaining part of your work can hardly be made the subject of animadversion. It principally consists of unsupported assertions, abusive appellations, illiberal sarcasms, *strifes of words, profane babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so called.* I am hurt at being, in mere justice to the subject, under the necessity of using such harsh language ; and am sincerely sorry that, from what cause I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point respecting revealed religion. You are capable of better things ; for there is a philosophical sublimity in some of your ideas, when you speak of the Supreme Being, as the Creator of the universe. That you may not accuse me of disrespect, in passing over any part of your work without bestowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call your conclusion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the Age of Reason ; in which you have spoken of what you esteem three frauds—mystery, miracle, and prophecy. I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have said on these subjects ; they are subjects of great importance, and we, probably, should differ essentially in our opinion concerning them ; but, I confess, I am not sorry to be excused from examining what you have said on these points. The specimen of your reasoning, which is now before me, has taken from me every inclination to trouble either my reader, or myself, with any observations on your former book.

You admit the possibility of God's revealing his will to man ; yet "the thing so revealed," you say "is revelation to the person only to whom it is made ; his account of it to another is not revelation." This is true ; his account is simple testimony. You add, there is no "possible criterion to judge of the truth of what he says." This I positively deny ; and contend that a real miracle, performed in attestation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that attestation. I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this position ; I have examined them with care ; I acknowledge them to be of weight ; but I do not speak unadvisedly or as wishing to dictate to other men, when I say, that I am persuaded the position is true. So thought Moses, when in the matter of Korah, he said to the Israelites—"If these men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me." So thought Elijah, when he said—"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in

Israel, and that I am thy servant :”—and the people before whom he spake, were of the same opinion ; for, when the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, they said—“The Lord he is the God.” So thought our Saviour, when he said—“the works that I do in my Father’s name they bear witness of me ;”—and, “if I do not the works of my Father believe me not.”

What reason have we to believe Jesus speaking in the Gospel, and to disbelieve Mahomet, speaking in the Koran ? Both of them lay claim to a Divine commission ; and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from God, and we reject the words of the other as an imposture of man. The reason is evident ; Jesus established his pretensions, not by alleging any secret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the presence of thousands, and which the most bitter and watchful of his enemies could not disallow ; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all : nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge the truth of a revelation. If a series of prophets should, through a course of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain person, whom God would at a particular time send into the world for a particular end, and at length a person should appear, in whom all the predictions were minutely accomplished ; such a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation which that person should deliver to mankind. Or if a person should now say (as many false prophets have said, and are daily saying), that he had a commission to declare the will of God ; and, as a proof of his veracity, should predict, that, after his death, he would rise from the dead on the third day ; the completion of such a prophecy would, I presume, be a sufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have said concerning the will of God. “Now I tell you (says Jesus to his disciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him) before it come, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he.”

In various parts of the Gospels our Saviour, with the utmost propriety, claims to be received as the messenger of God, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and from the predictions which he himself delivered. Hence, instead of there being no criterion by which we may judge of the truth of the Christian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an easy matter to use an indecorous flippancy of language in speaking of the Christian religion, and with a supercilious negligence to class Christ and his apostles among the impostors who have figured in the world : but it is not, I think, an easy matter for any man, of good sense, and sound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one of the three grounds of Christianity which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches ?—The prophet Micah shall answer you : it teaches us—“to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God ;”—justice, mercy, and piety, instead of what you contend for,—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us ? You answer your question—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman. Absurd and impious assertion ! No, Sir, no ; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perversion of Scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to infidels as well as to believers ; it is a lesson which philo-

sophy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor sophistry disprove; the lesson is this—"The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live:—all that are in their graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

The moral precepts of the Gospel are so well fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that blessedness, of which in our present state, we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your disapprobation. You say, however,—“As to the scraps of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion.” “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” Is this a scrap of morality? Is it not rather the concentrated essence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived?—Duties, you know, are distinguished by moralists into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation: does the Bible teach you nothing, when it instructs you, that this distinction is done away? when it bids you “put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any.” These, and precepts such as these, you will in vain look for in the codes of *Frederick* or *Justinian*; you cannot find them in your statute books; they were not taught, nor are they taught, in the schools of heathen philosophy; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by a Plato, a Seneca, or a Cicero, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the Gospel, and in the Gospel alone, that we learn their importance; acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be to an unbeliever voluntary acts, to a Christian they are indispensable duties. Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion? “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another:” the law of Christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself, in the most solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts you particularize as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies. Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase; “If a man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also?” Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him? It is evident that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined; and that a proneness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality, for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained in another place, to mean, the doing them all the good in our power; “if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink;” and what think you is more likely to preserve peace, and to promote kind affections amongst men, than the returning good for evil? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury—“it does not offer a premium for a crime;”—it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of God himself, who maketh “his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.”

In the law of Moses, retaliation for deliberate injuries had been or-

dained—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. *Aristotle*, in his treatise of morals, says, that some thought retaliation of personal wrongs an equitable proceeding; *Rhadamanthus* is said to have given it his sanction; the decemviral laws allowed it; the common law of England did not forbid it, and it is said to be still the law of some countries, even in Christendom: but the mild spirit of Christianity absolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every resentful propensity.*

"It has been," you affirm, "the scheme of the Christian church to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights." I appeal to the plain sense of any honest man to judge whether this representation be true in either particular. When he attends the service of the church, does he discover any design in the minister to keep him in ignorance of his Creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, the lessons which are read to him, the sermons which are preached to him, all calculated to impress upon his mind a strong conviction of the mercy, justice, holiness, power, and wisdom of the one adorable God, blessed forever? By these means which the Christian church has provided for our instruction, I will venture to say, that the most unlearned congregation of Christians in Great Britain have more just and sublime conceptions of the Creator, a more perfect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a stronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holiness, and temperance, than all the philosophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your scheme should take place, and men should no longer believe their Bible, then would they soon become as ignorant of the Creator, as all the world was when God called Abraham from his kindred; and as all the world, which has had no communication with either Jews or Christians, now is. Then would they soon bow down to stocks and stones, kiss their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now,) to the moon walking in brightness, and deny the God that is above; then would they worship Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus, and emulate, in the transcendant flagitiousness of their lives, the impure morals of their gods.

What design has government to keep men in ignorance of their rights? None whatever. All wise statesmen are persuaded, that the more men know of their rights, the better subjects they will become. Subjects, not from necessity but choice, are the firmest friends of every government. The people of Great Britain are well acquainted with their natural and social rights: they understand them better than the people of any other country do; they know that they have a right to be free, not only from the capricious tyranny of any one man's will, but from the more afflicting despotism of republican factions; and it is this very knowledge which attaches them to the constitution of their country. I have no fear that the people should know too much of their rights; my fear is that

* This passage seems to imply that there is an inconsistency betwixt the Mosaic and Christian codes, regarding retaliation. Though this sentiment is common it is more than doubtful. Moses did not mean in the law referred to above to give a rule for the regulation of private revenge, but for the administration of public justice—a rule by the spirit of which all just legislation and judicial proceedings in every age must be animated—since it merely commands an equitable adjustment between the degrees of crime and their legal punishment.—Ed. Committee.

they should not know them in all their relations, and to their full extent. The government does not desire that men should remain in ignorance of their rights; but it both desires and requires, that they should not disturb the public peace under vain pretences: that they should make themselves acquainted, not merely with the rights, but with the duties also of men in civil society. I am far from ridiculing (as some have done) the rights of man; I have long ago understood, that the poor as well as the rich, and that the rich as well as the poor, have, by nature, some rights, which no human government can justly take from them, without their tacit or express consent; and some also, which they themselves have no power to surrender to any government. One of the principal rights of man, in a state either of nature or of society, is a right of property in the fruits of his industry, ingenuity, or good fortune. Does government hold any man in ignorance of this right? So much the contrary, that the chief care of government is to declare, ascertain, modify, and defend this right; nay, it gives right where nature gives none; it protects the goods of an intestate; and it allows a man, at his death, to dispose of that property, which the law of nature would cause to revert into the common stock. Sincerely as I am attached to the liberties of mankind, I cannot but profess myself an utter enemy to that spurious philosophy, that democratic insanity, which would equalize all property, and level all distinctions, in civil society. Personal distinctions, arising from superior probity, learning, eloquence, skill, courage, and from every other excellency of talents, are the very blood and nerves of the body politic; they animate the whole, and invigorate every part; without them, its bones would become reeds, and its marrow water; it would presently sink into a fetid senseless mass of corruption. Power may be used for private ends, and in opposition to the public good; rank may be improperly conferred, and insolently sustained; riches may be wickedly acquired, and viciously applied: but as this is neither necessarily, nor generally the case, I cannot agree with those, who, in asserting the natural equality of men, spurn the instituted distinctions attending power, rank, and riches. But I mean not to enter into any discussion on this subject, farther than to say, that your crimination of government appears to me to be wholly unfounded; and to express my hope, that no one individual will be so far misled by disquisitions on the rights of man, as to think that he has any right to do wrong, or to forget that other men have rights as well as he.

You are animated with proper sentiments of piety, when you speak of the structure of the universe. No one, indeed, who considers it with attention, can fail of having his mind filled with the supremest veneration for its author. Who can contemplate, without astonishment, the motion of a comet, running far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavoring to escape into the pathless regions of unbounded space, yet feeling, at its utmost distance, the attractive influence of the sun; hearing, as it were, the voice of God arresting its progress, and compelling it, after a lapse of ages, to reiterate its ancient course? Who can comprehend the distance of the stars from the earth, and from each other? It is so great, that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded, and lost, when we are told, that a ray of light, which moves at the rate of ten millions of miles in a minute, will not, though emitted at this instant from the brightest star, reach the earth in less than six years.

We think this earth a great globe ; and we see the sad wickedness which individuals are often guilty of, in scraping together a little of its dirt ; we view, with still greater astonishment and horror, the mighty ruin which has, in all ages, been brought upon human kind, by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary possession of a little portion of its surface. But how does the whole of this globe sink, as it were, to nothing, when we consider, that a million of earths will scarcely equal the bulk of the sun ; that all the stars are suns ; and that millions of suns constitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world, which God hath distributed through the immensity of space ! Systems, however, of insensible matter, though arranged in exquisite order, prove only the wisdom and the power of the great Architect of nature. As percipient beings, we look for something more ; for his goodness ; and we cannot open our eyes without seeing it.

Every portion of the earth, sea, and air, is full of sensitive beings, capable, in their respective orders, of enjoying the good things which God has prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind ; and thus provision is made for a successive continuation of happiness. Individuals yield to the law of dissolution inseparable from the material structure of their bodies : but no gap is thereby left in existence ; their place is occupied by other individuals, capable of participating in the goodness of the Almighty. Contemplations such as these fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why should we stop here ? why not contemplate the goodness of God in the redemption, as well as in the creation of the world ? By the death of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, he hath redeemed the whole human race from the eternal death, which the transgression of Adam had entailed on all his posterity. You believe nothing about the transgression of Adam. The history of Eve and the serpent excites your contempt ; you will not admit that it is either a real history, or an allegorical representation of death entering into the world through disobedience to the command of God. Be it so. You find, however, that death doth reign over all mankind, by whatever mean it was introduced ; this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge. The New Testament tells us, that, through the merciful dispensation of God, Christ hath overcome death, and restored man to that immortality which Adam had lost. This also you refuse to believe. Why ? Because you cannot account for the propriety of this redemption. Miserable reason ! stupid objection ! What is there that you can account for ? Not for the germination of a blade of grass, not for the fall of a leaf of the forest ; and will you refuse to eat of the fruits of the earth, because God has not given you wisdom equal to his own ? Will you refuse to lay hold on immortality, because he has not given you, because he, probably, could not give to such a being as man a full manifestation of the end for which he designs him, nor of the means requisite for the attainment of that end ? What father of a family can make level to the apprehension of his infant children, all the views of happiness which his paternal goodness is preparing for them ? How can he explain to them the utility of reproof, correction, instruction, example, of all the various means by which he forms their minds to piety, temperance, and probity ? We are children in the hand of God ; we are in the very infancy of our existence, just separated from the womb of eternal duration ; it may not

be possible for the Father of the universe to explain to us (infants in apprehension) the goodness and the wisdom of his dealings with the sons of men. What qualities of mind will be necessary for our well-doing through all eternity, we know not; what discipline in this infancy of existence may be necessary for generating these qualities, we know not; whether God could or could not consistently with the general good, have forgiven the transgression of Adam, without any atonement, we know not; whether the malignity of sin be not so great, so opposite to the general good, that it cannot be forgiven whilst it exists, that is, whilst the mind retains a propensity to it, we know not; so that if there should be much greater difficulty in comprehending the mode of God's moral government of mankind than there really is, there would be no reason for doubting of its rectitude. If the whole human race be considered as but one small member of a large community of free and intelligent beings of different orders, and if this whole community be subject to discipline and laws productive of the greatest possible good to the whole system, then may we still more reasonably suspect our capacity to comprehend the wisdom and goodness of all God's proceedings in the moral government of the universe.

You are lavish in your praise of deism; it is so much better than atheism, that I mean not to say any thing to its discredit; it is not, however, without its difficulties. What think you of an uncaused cause of every thing? of a Being who has no relation to time, not being older to-day than he was yesterday, nor younger to-day than he will be to-morrow? who has no relation to space, not being a part here and a part there, or a whole anywhere? What think you of an omniscient Being, who cannot know the future actions of a man? Or, if his omniscience enables him to know them, what think you of the contingency of human actions? And if human actions are not contingent, what think you of the morality of actions, of the distinction between vice and virtue, crime and innocence, sin and duty? What think you of the infinite goodness of a Being, who existed through eternity, without any emanation of his goodness manifested in the creation of sensitive beings? Or, if you contend that there has been an eternal creation, what think you of an effect coeval with its cause, of matter not posterior to its Maker? What think you of the existence of evil, moral and natural, in the work of an infinite Being, powerful, wise, and good? What think you of the gift of freedom of will, when the abuse of freedom becomes the cause of general misery? I could propose to your consideration a great many other questions of a similar tendency, the contemplation of which has driven not a few from deism to atheism, just as the difficulties in revealed religion have driven yourself, and some others, from Christianity to deism.

For my own part, I can see no reason why either revealed or natural religion should be abandoned, on account of the difficulties which attend either of them. I look up to the incomprehensible Maker of heaven and earth with unspeakable admiration and self-annihilation, and am a deist. I contemplate, with the utmost gratitude and humility of mind, his unsearchable wisdom and goodness in the redemption of the world from eternal death, through the intervention of his Son Jesus Christ, and am a Christian. As a deist, I have little expectation; as a Christian, I have no doubt of a future state. I speak for myself, and

may be in an error, as to the ground of the first part of this opinion. You, and other men, may conclude differently. From the inert nature of matter, from the faculties of the human mind, from the apparent imperfection of God's moral government of the world, from many modes of analogical reasoning, and from other sources, some of the philosophers of antiquity, did collect, and modern philosophers may, perhaps, collect a strong probability of a future existence; and not only of a future existence, but (which is quite a distinct question) of a future state of retribution, proportioned to our moral conduct in this world. Far be it from me to loosen any of the obligations to virtue; but I must confess, that I cannot, from the same sources of argumentation, derive any positive assurance on the subject. Think then with what thankfulness of heart I receive the word of God, which tells me, that though "in Adam (by the condition of our nature) all die:" yet "in Christ (by the covenant of grace) shall all be made alive." I lay hold on "eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ;" I consider it not as any appendage to the nature I derive from Adam, but as the free gift of the Almighty, through his Son, whom he hath constituted Lord of all, the Saviour, the Advocate, and the Judge of human kind.

"Deism," you affirm, "teaches us, without the possibility of being mistaken, all that is necessary or proper to be known." There are three things, which all reasonable men admit are necessary and proper to be known; the being of God; the providence of God; a future state of retribution. Whether these three truths are so taught us by deism, that there is no possibility of being mistaken concerning any of them, let the history of philosophy, and of idolatry, and superstition, in all ages and countries, determine. A volume might be filled with an account of the mistakes into which the greatest reasoners have fallen, and of the uncertainty in which they lived, with respect to every one of these points. I will advert, briefly, only to the last of them. Notwithstanding the illustrious labors of Gassendi, Cudworth, Clarke, Baxter, and of above two hundred other modern writers on the subject, the *natural* mortality or immortality of the human soul is as little understood by us, as it was by the philosophers of Greece or Rome. The opposite opinions of Plato and of Epicurus, on this subject, have their several supporters amongst the learned of the present age, in Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, in every enlightened part of the world; and they, who have been most seriously occupied in the study of the question concerning a future state, as deducible from the nature of the human soul, are least disposed to give, from reason, a positive decision of it either way. The importance of revelation is by nothing rendered more apparent, than by the discordant sentiments of learned and good men (for I speak not of the ignorant and immoral) on this point. They show the insufficiency of human reason, in a course of above two thousand years, to unfold the mysteries of human nature, and to furnish, from the contemplation of it, any assurance of the quality of our future condition. If you should ever become persuaded of this insufficiency (and you can scarce fail of becoming so, if you examine the matter deeply), you will, if you act rationally, be disposed to investigate, with seriousness and impartiality, the truth of Christianity. You will say of the Gospel, as the Northumbrian heathens said to Paulinus, by whom they were converted to the Christian religion; "The more we reflect

on the nature of our soul, the less we know of it. Whilst it animates our body, we may know some of its properties ; but when once separated, we know not whither it goes, or from whence it came.— Since, then, the Gospel pretends to give us clearer notions of these matters, we ought to hear it, and laying aside all passion and prejudice, follow that which shall appear most conformable to right reason.”

What a blessing is it to beings, with such limited capacities as ours confessedly are, to have God himself for our instructor in every thing which it much concerns us to know ! We are principally concerned in knowing, not the origin of arts, or the recondite depths of science ; not the histories of mighty empires desolating the globe by their contentions ; not the subtilties of logic, the mysteries of metaphysics, the subtilities of poetry, or the niceties of criticism. These, and subjects such as these, properly occupy the learned leisure of a few : but the bulk of human kind have ever been, and must ever remain, ignorant of them all ; they must, of necessity, remain in the same state with that which a German emperor voluntarily put himself into, when he made a resolution, bordering on barbarism, that he would never read a printed book. We are all, of every rank and condition, equally concerned in knowing—what will become of us after death ; and, if we are to live again, we are interested in knowing whether it be possible for us to do any thing whilst we live here, which may render that future life a happy one. Now, “that thing called Christianity,” as you scoffingly speak ; that last best gift of Almighty God, as I esteem it, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, has given us the most clear and satisfactory information on both these points. It tells us, what deism never could have told us, that we shall certainly be raised from the dead ; that, whatever be the nature of the soul, we shall certainly live forever ; and that, whilst we live here, it is possible for us to do much towards the rendering that everlasting life a happy one. These are tremendous truths to bad men ; they cannot be received and reflected on with indifference by the best ; and they suggest to all such a cogent motive to virtuous action, as deism could not furnish even to Brutus himself.

Some men have been warped to infidelity by viciousness of life ; and some may have hypocritically professed Christianity from prospects of temporal advantage : but, being a stranger to your character, I neither impute the former to you, nor can admit the latter as operating on myself. The generality of unbelievers are such, from want of information on the subject of religion ; having been engaged from their youth in struggling for worldly distinction, or perplexed with the incessant intricacies of business, or bewildered in the pursuits of pleasure, they have neither ability, inclination, nor leisure, to enter into critical disquisitions concerning the truth of Christianity. Men of this description are soon startled by objections which they are not competent to answer ; and the loose morality of the age (so opposite to Christian perfection), co-operating with their want of Scriptural knowledge, they presently get rid of their nursery faith, and are seldom sedulous in the acquisition of another, founded, not on authority, but sober investigation. Presuming, however, that many deists are as sincere in their belief as I am in mine, and knowing that some are more able, and all as much interested as myself, to make a rational inquiry into the truth of revealed religion, I feel no propensity to judge uncharitably of any of them. They do not

think, as I do, on a subject surpassing all others in importance; but they are not, on that account, to be spoken of by me with asperity of language, to be thought of by me as persons alienated from the mercies of God. The Gospel has been offered to their acceptance; and, from whatever cause they reject it, I cannot but esteem their situation to be dangerous. Under the influence of that persuasion I have been induced to write this book. I do not expect to derive from it either fame or profit; these are not improper incentives to honorable activity; but there is a time of life when they cease to direct the judgment of thinking men. What I have written will not, I fear, make any impression on you; but I indulge a hope, that it may not be without its effect on some of your readers. Infidelity is a rank weed; it threatens to overspread the land; its root is principally fixed amongst the great and opulent, but you are endeavoring to extend the malignity of its poison through all the classes of the community. There is a class of men, for whom I have the greatest respect, and whom I am anxious to preserve from the contamination of your irreligion; the merchants, manufacturers, and tradesmen of the kingdom. I consider the influence of the example of this class as essential to the welfare of the community. I know that they are in general given to reading, and desirous of information on all subjects. If this little book should chance to fall into their hands after they have read yours, and they should think that any of your objections to the authority of the Bible have not been fully answered, I entreat them to attribute the omission to the brevity which I have studied; to my desire of avoiding learned disquisitions; to my inadvertency; to my inability; to any thing rather than to an impossibility of completely obviating every difficulty you have brought forward. I address the same request to such of the youth of both sexes as may unhappily have imbibed from your writings, the poison of infidelity; beseeching them to believe, that all their religious doubts may be removed, though it may not have been in my power to answer, to their satisfaction, all your objections. I pray God that the rising generation of this land may be preserved from that "evil heart of unbelief," which has brought ruin on a neighboring nation; that neither a neglected education, nor domestic irreligion, nor evil communication, nor the fashion of a licentious world, may ever induce them to forget, that religion alone ought to be their rule of life.

In the conclusion of my Apology for Christianity, I informed Mr. Gibbon of my extreme aversion to public controversy. I am now twenty years older than I was then, and I perceive that this my aversion has increased with my age. I have, through life, abandoned my little literary productions to their fate; such of them as have been attacked, have never received any defence from me; nor will this receive any, if it should meet with your public notice, or with that of any other man.

Sincerely wishing that you may become a partaker of that faith in revealed religion, which is the foundation of my happiness in this world, and of all my hopes in another, I bid you farewell.

R. LANDAFF.

CALGARTH PARK, Jan. 20, 1796.

AN APOLOGY

FOR

CHRISTIANITY,

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

EDWARD GIBBON, Esq.,

AUTHOR OF THE HISTORY OF THE DECLINE AND FALL
OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

BY R. WATSON, DD. F.R.S.

AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

New-York:

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY FOR THE DIFFUSION OF
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

1835.



THE AUTHOR'S ADVERTISEMENT.

I KNOW not whether I may be allowed, without the imputation of vanity, to express the satisfaction I felt on being told by my bookseller, that another edition of the APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANITY was wanted. It is a satisfaction, however, in which vanity has no part ; it is altogether founded in the delightful hope, that I may have been, in a small degree, instrumental in recommending the religion of Christ to the attention of some, who might not otherwise have considered it with that serious and unprejudiced disposition which its importance requires.

The celebrity of the work which gave rise to this apology, has, no doubt, principally contributed to its circulation : could I have entertained a thought, that it would have been called for so many years after its first publication, I would have endeavored to have rendered it more intrinsically worthy the public regard. It becomes not me, however, to depreciate what the world has approved ; rather let me express an earnest wish, that those, who dislike not this little book, will peruse larger ones on the same subject : in them they will see the defects of this so abundantly supplied, as will, I trust, convince them, that the Christian religion is not a system of superstition, invented by enthusiasts, and patronized by statesmen for secular ends, but a revelation of the will of God.

LONDON, *March* 10, 1791.

P R E F A C E .

WERE it possible to invalidate the evidence of Christianity by a disproof of its prominent facts, it is to be presumed that this would long since have been effected. And if *Edward Gibbon* has not attempted this, when the subject came legitimately before him, it may reasonably be concluded that the fear of failure was the preventing motive. He does not commit himself by making a direct attack upon Christianity ; nor would he appear to a mere superficial reader of his history to design any attack at all. His general language too, is that of respect for Christianity and its founder.

All this, however, is the mere gilding of the bitter pill of covert infidelity. The effort is to infuse the moral poison into the system, through a medium in itself unexceptionable.

The work of Gibbon to which Bishop Watson's Apology is a reply, appeared in the form of a "*Candid but rational inquiry into the progress and establishment of Christianity.*" It is contained principally in the 15th and 16th chapters of his great work "on the Decline and

PREFACE.

Fall of the Roman Empire," and thus goes in this connexion, to the hands of every individual, and into every family who read that captivating history; a connexion prolific of mischief as it identifies the teacher of infidelity, with the scholar and historian, otherwise authentic.

The course pursued by Gibbon is to admit the existence of a great moral revolution throughout the entire civilized world, as produced by the introduction and establishment of Christianity. Admitting this fact, which is indeed undeniable, he attempts to account for it upon mere natural principles. His causes however, are entirely inadequate to the effects attributed to them, and he seems to labor under the conviction of this truth; for his effort is to explain away, and fritter down to insignificance the great facts which he first admits, and for which he professes to account.

In all this we have an example of what perhaps might be aptly styled the jesuitism of infidelity. And the result at which the author of the "Decline and Fall" evidently desired to bring his readers, was that at which his own mind had already come—that in giving up the religions of Judea and the other departments of the Pagan Roman Empire, for that of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, the world was doing little more than exchanging one system of delusion for another, a little more refined and intellectual.

In Watson's "Apology for Christianity," we are furnished with a very efficient antidote to the poison of Gibbon's polite and insinuating deism. On the same occasion and for the accomplishment of the same object many others took the field. There were none however, who seemed to wield a more successful weapon than the Bishop of Landaff. And his production may be considered as an unanswered and unanswerable argument in behalf of the Divine authority of the religion of Jesus Christ.

The danger of Gibbon's treatise consists principally in its insidiousness. Nor is he without his imitators in the present day. For while Paine has his servile copyists, it would seem to be the professed system of infidel tactics, after the example of Gibbon, to make the discourse on politics, the treatise on phrenology, or the lecture on natural science the medium of disseminating irreligious principles, rather than other modes of more easy detection.

With these observations the "*Society for the Diffusion of Christian Knowledge*" would recommend to the community "Watson's Apology for Christianity"—while they are not to be considered as endorsing every sentiment it may contain.

EDITING COMMITTEE.

AN

APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANITY.

LETTER I.

SIR:—It would give me much uneasiness to be reputed an enemy to free inquiry in religious matters, or as capable of being animated into any degree of personal malevolence against those who differ from me in opinion. On the contrary, I look upon the right of private judgment, in every concern respecting God and ourselves, as superior to the control of human authority; and have ever regarded free disquisition as the best mean of illustrating the doctrine, and establishing the truth of Christianity. Let the followers of Mahomet, and the zealots of the church of Rome, support their several religious systems by damping every effort of the human intellect to pry into the foundations of their faith: but never can it become a Christian, to be afraid of being asked “a reason of the faith that is in him;” nor a Protestant, to be studious of enveloping his religion in mystery and ignorance; nor the Church of England, to abandon that moderation by which she permits every individual *et sentire quæ velit, et quæ sentiat dicere*.

It is not, Sir, without some reluctance, that, under the influence of these opinions, I have prevailed upon myself to address these Letters to you; and you will attribute to the same motive my not having given you this trouble sooner. I had, moreover, an expectation, that the task would have been undertaken by some person capable of doing greater justice to the subject, and more worthy of your attention. Perceiving, however, that the two last chapters, the fifteenth in particular, of your very laborious and classical history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, had made upon many an impression not at all advantageous to Christianity; and that the silence of others, of the clergy especially, began to be looked upon as an acquiescence in what you had therein advanced; I have thought it my duty, with the utmost respect and good-will towards you, to take the liberty of suggesting to your consideration a few remarks upon some of the passages, which have been esteemed (whether you meant that they should be so esteemed or not,) as powerfully militating against that revelation, which still is to many, what it formerly was “to the Greeks—foolishness;” but which we deem to be true, to “be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

To the inquiry, by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth, you rightly answer, by the evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling providence of its author. But afterwards, in assigning to this astonishing event five secondary causes, derived from the passions of the human heart, and the

general circumstances of mankind, you seem to some to have insinuated that Christianity, like other impostures, might have made its way in the world, though its origin had been as human as the means by which you suppose it was spread. It is no wish or intention of mine to fasten the odium of this insinuation upon you: I shall simply endeavor to show, that the causes you produce are either inadequate to the attainment of the end proposed; or that their efficiency, great as you imagine it, was derived from other principles than those you have thought proper to mention.

Your first cause is, "the inflexible, and, if you may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit, which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses."—Yes, Sir, we are agreed that the zeal of the Christians was inflexible; "neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come," could bend it into a separation "from the love of God which was in Christ Jesus their Lord:" it was an inflexible obstinacy, in not blaspheming the name of Christ, which everywhere exposed them to persecution; and which even your amiable and philosophic Pliny thought proper, for want of other crimes, to punish with death in the Christians of his province. We are agreed, too, that the zeal of the Christians was intolerant; for it denounced "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that did evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile:" it would not tolerate in Christian worship those who supplicated the image of Cæsar, who bowed down at the altars of Paganism, who mixed with the votaries of Venus, or wallowed in the filth of Bacchanalian festivals.

But though we are thus far agreed with respect to the inflexibility and intolerance of Christian zeal, yet, as to the principle from which it was derived, we are *toto cælo* divided in opinion. You deduce it from the Jewish religion: I would refer it to a more adequate and a more obvious source, a full persuasion of the truth of Christianity. What! think you that it was a zeal derived from the unsocial spirit of Judaism, which inspired Peter with courage to upbraid the whole people of the Jews, in the very capital of Judea, with having "delivered up Jesus, with having denied him in the presence of Pilate, with having desired a murderer to be granted them in his stead, with having killed the Prince of life?"—Was it from this principle that the same apostle, in conjunction with John, when summoned, not before the dregs of the people (whose judgments they might have been supposed capable of misleading, and whose resentment they might have despised), but before the rulers and the elders, and the scribes, the dread tribunal of the Jewish nation, and commanded by them to teach no more in the name of Jesus—boldly answered, "that they could not but speak the things which they had seen and heard? They had seen with their eyes, they had handled with their hands, the word of life;" and no human jurisdiction could deter them from being faithful witnesses of what they had seen and heard. Here, then, you may perceive the genuine and undoubted origin of that zeal, which you ascribe to what appears to me a very insufficient cause; and which the Jewish rulers were so far from considering as the ordinary effect of their religion, that they were exceedingly at a loss how to account for it:—"now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and

perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled." The apostles, heedless of consequences, and regardless of everything but truth, openly everywhere professed themselves witnesses of the resurrection of Christ; and with a confidence which could proceed from nothing but conviction, and which pricked the Jews to the heart, bade "the house of Israel know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ."

I mean not to produce these instances of apostolic zeal as direct proofs of the truth of Christianity; for every religion, nay, every absurd sect of every religion, has had its zealots, who have not scrupled to maintain their principles at the expense of their lives: and we ought no more to infer the truth of Christianity from the mere zeal of its propagators, than the truth of Mahometanism from that of a Turk. When a man suffers himself to be covered with infamy, pillaged of his property, and dragged at last to the block or the stake, rather than give up his opinion; the proper inference is, not that his opinion is true, but that he believes it to be true; and a question of serious discussion immediately presents itself—upon what foundation has he built his belief? This is often an intricate inquiry, including in it a vast compass of human learning. A Bramin or a Mandarin, who should observe a missionary attesting the truth of Christianity with his blood, would, notwithstanding, have a right to ask many questions, before it could be expected that he should give an assent to our faith. In the case, indeed, of the apostles, the inquiry would be much less perplexed; since it would briefly resolve itself into this—whether they were credible reporters of facts, which they themselves professed to have seen—and it would be an easy matter to show, that their zeal in attesting what they were certainly competent to judge of, could not proceed from any alluring prospect of worldly interest or ambition, or from any other probable motive than a love of truth.

But the credibility of the apostles' testimony, or their competency to judge of the facts which they relate, is not now to be examined; the question before us simply relates to the principle by which their zeal was excited: and it is a matter of real astonishment to me, that any one conversant with the history of the first propagation of Christianity, acquainted with the opposition it everywhere met with from the people of the Jews, and aware of the repugnancy which must ever subsist between its tenets and those of Judaism, should ever think of deriving the zeal of the primitive Christians from the Jewish religion.

Both Jew and Christian, indeed, believed in one God, and abominated idolatry: but this detestation of idolatry, had it been unaccompanied with the belief of the resurrection of Christ, would probably have been just as inefficacious in exciting the zeal of the Christian to undertake the conversion of the Gentile world, as it had for ages been in exciting that of the Jew. But supposing, what I think you have not proved, and what I am certain cannot be admitted without proof, that a zeal derived from the Jewish religion inspired the first Christians with fortitude to oppose themselves to the institutions of Paganism; what was it that encouraged them to attempt the conversion of their own countrymen? Amongst the Jews they met with no superstitious observance of idolatrous rites; and therefore amongst them could have no opportunity of "declaring and confirming their zealous opposition to Polytheism, or of

fortifying, by frequent protestations, their attachment to the Christian faith." Here then, at least, the cause you have assigned for Christian zeal ceases to operate; and we must look out for some other principle than a zeal against idolatry, or we shall never be able satisfactorily to explain the ardor with which the apostles pressed the disciples of Moses to become the disciples of Christ.

Again : Does a determined opposition to, and an open abhorrence of every the minutest part of an old established religion, appear to you to be the most likely method of conciliating to another faith those who profess it ? The Christians, you contend, could neither mix with the heathens in their convivial entertainments, nor partake with them in the celebration of their solemn festivals : they could neither associate with them in their hymeneal nor funeral rites : they could not cultivate their arts, or be spectators of their shows : in short, in order to escape the rites of Polytheism, they were in your opinion obliged to renounce the commerce of mankind, and all the offices and amusements of life. Now, how such an extravagant and intemperate zeal as you here describe, can, humanly speaking, be considered as one of the chief causes of the quick propagation of Christianity, in opposition to all the established powers of paganism, is a circumstance I can by no means comprehend. The Jesuit missionaries, whose human prudence no one will question, were quite of a contrary way of thinking ; and brought a deserved censure upon themselves, for not scrupling to propagate the faith of Christ by indulging to their pagan converts a frequent use of idolatrous ceremonies. Upon the whole it appears to me, that the Christians were in nowise indebted to the Jewish religion for the zeal with which they propagated the Gospel amongst Jews as well as Gentiles ; and that such a zeal as you describe, let its principles be what you please, could never have been devised by any human understanding as a probable mean of promoting the progress of a reformation in religion, much less could it have been thought of or adopted by a few ignorant and unconnected men.

In expatiating upon this subject you have taken an opportunity of remarking, that "the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua had beheld with careless indifference the most amazing miracles—and that, in contradiction to every known principle of the human mind, that singular people (the Jews) seems to have yielded a stronger and more ready assent to the traditions of their remote ancestors, than to the evidence of their own senses." This observation bears hard upon the veracity of the Jewish Scriptures ; and, was it true, would force us either to reject them, or to admit a position as extraordinary as a miracle itself—that the testimony of others produced in the human mind a stronger degree of conviction, concerning a matter of fact, than the testimony of the senses themselves. It happens, however, in the present case, that we are under no necessity of either rejecting the Jewish Scriptures, or of admitting such an absurd position ; for the fact is not true, that the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua beheld with careless indifference the miracles related in the Bible to have been performed in their favor. That these miracles were not sufficient to awe the Israelites into a uniform obedience to the Theocracy, cannot be denied ; but whatever reasons may be thought best adapted to account for the propensity of the Jews to idolatry, and their frequent defection from the worship of the

one true God, a "stubborn incredulity" cannot be admitted as one of them.

To men, indeed, whose understandings have been enlightened by the Christian revelation, and enlarged by all the aids of human learning; who are under no temptations to idolatry from without, and whose reason from within would revolt at the idea of worshipping the infinite Author of the universe under any created symbol; to men who are compelled, by the utmost exertion of their reason, to admit as an irrefragible truth, what puzzles the first principles of all reasoning, the eternal existence of an uncaused being; and who are conscious that they cannot give a full account of any one phenomenon in nature, from the rotation of the great orbs of the universe to the germination of a blade of grass, without having recourse to him as the primary incomprehensible cause of it; and who, from seeing him everywhere, have, by a strange fatality (converting an excess of evidence into a principle of disbelief), at times doubted concerning his existence anywhere, and made the very universe their God; to men of such a stamp, it appears almost an incredible thing, that any human being, which had seen the order of nature interrupted, or the uniformity of its course suspended, though but for a moment, should ever afterwards lose the impression of reverential awe which they apprehend would have been excited in their minds.—But whatever effect the visible interposition of the Deity might have in removing the scepticism, or confirming the faith, of a few philosophers, it is with me a very great doubt, whether the people in general of our days would be more strongly affected by it than they appear to have been in the days of Moses.

Was any people under heaven to escape the certain destruction impending over them, from the close pursuit of an enraged and irresistible enemy, by seeing the waters of the ocean "becoming a wall to them on their right hand and on their left;" they would, I apprehend, be agitated by the very same passions we are told the Israelites were, when they saw the sea returning to his strength, and swallowing up the host of Pharaoh; they "would fear the Lord, they would believe the Lord," and they would express their faith and their fear by praising the Lord: they would not behold such a great work with "careless indifference," but with astonishment and terror; nor would you be able to detect the slightest vestige of "stubborn incredulity" in their song of gratitude. No length of time would be able to blot from their minds the memory of such a transaction, or induce a doubt concerning its author; though future hunger and thirst might make them call out for water and bread, with a desponding and rebellious importunity.

But it was not at the Red Sea only that the Israelites regarded with something more than a "careless indifference" the amazing miracles which God had wrought; for, when the law was declared to them from Mount Sinai, "all the people saw the thunders, and the lightnings, and the noise of the tempest, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off: and they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." This again, Sir, is the Scripture account of the language of the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua; and I leave it to you to consider whether this is the language of "stubborn incredulity and careless indifference."

We are told, in Scripture, too, that whilst any of the "contemporaries" of Moses and Joshua were alive, the whole people served the Lord; the impression which a sight of the miracles had made was never effaced; nor the obedience, which might have been expected as a natural consequence, refused, till Moses and Joshua, and all their contemporaries, were gathered unto their fathers; till "another generation after them arose, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel." But "the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel."

I am far from thinking you, Sir, unacquainted with Scripture, or desirous of sinking the weight of its testimony; but as the words of the history, from which you must have derived your observation, will not support you in imputing "careless indifference" to the contemporaries of Moses, or "stubborn incredulity" to the forefathers of the Jews, I know not what can have induced you to pass so severe a censure upon them, except that you look upon a lapse into idolatry as a proof of infidelity. In answer to this I would remark, that with equal soundness of argument we ought to infer, that every one, who transgresses a religion, disbelieves it; and that every individual, who in any community incurs civil pains and penalties, is a disbeliever of the existence of the authority by which they are inflicted. The sanction of the Mosaic law were, in your opinion, terminated within the narrow limits of this life; in that particular, then, they must have resembled the sanctions of all other civil laws: "transgress and die" is the language of every one of them, as well as that of Moses; and I know not what reason we have to expect, that the Jews, who were animated by the same hopes of temporal rewards, impelled by the same fears of temporal punishments, with the rest of mankind, should have been so singular in their conduct, as never to have listened to the clamors of passion before the still voice of reason; as never to have preferred a present gratification of sense, in the lewd celebration of idolatrous rites, before the rigid observance of irksome ceremonies.

Before I release you from the trouble of this Letter, I cannot help observing, that I could have wished you had furnished your reader with Limborch's answers to the objections of the Jew Orobio, concerning the perpetual obligation of the law of Moses. You have, indeed, mentioned Limborch with respect, in a short note; but though you have studiously put into the mouths of the Judaizing Christians in the apostolic days, and with great strength inserted into your text, whatever has been said by Orobio or others against Christianity, from the supposed perpetuity of the Mosaic dispensation; yet you have not favored us with any one of the numerous replies which have been made to these seemingly strong objections. You are pleased, it is true, to say, "that the industry of our learned divines has abundantly explained the ambiguous language of the Old Testament, and the ambiguous conduct of the apostolic teachers." It requires, Sir, no learned industry to explain what is so obvious and so express, that he who runs may read it. The language of the Old Testament is this: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the

land of Egypt." This, methinks, is a clear and solemn declaration ; there is no ambiguity at all in it ; that the covenant with Moses was not to be perpetual, but was in some future time to give way to a "new covenant." I will not detain you with an explanation of what Moses himself has said upon this subject ; but you may try, if you please, whether you can apply the following declaration, which Moses made to the Jews, to any prophet or succession of prophets, with the same propriety that you can to Jesus Christ : "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto thee : unto him shall ye hearken." If you think this ambiguous or obscure, I answer, that it is not a history, but a prophecy ; and, as such, unavoidably liable to some degree of obscurity, till interpreted by the event.

Nor was the conduct of the apostles more ambiguous than the language of the Old Testament : they did not indeed at first comprehend the whole of the nature of the new dispensation : and when they did understand it better, they did not think proper upon every occasion to use their Christian liberty ; but, with true Christian charity, accommodated themselves in matters of indifference to the prejudices of their weaker brethren. But he who changes his conduct with a change of sentiments, proceeding from an increase of knowledge, is not ambiguous in his conduct ; nor should he be accused of a culpable duplicity, who, in a matter of the last importance, endeavors to conciliate the good-will of all, by conforming in a few innocent observances to the particular persuasions of different men.

One remark more, and I have done. In your account of the Gnostics, you have given us a very minute catalogue of the objections which they made to the authority of Moses, from his account of the creation, of the patriarchs, of the law, and of the attributes of the Deity. I have not leisure to examine whether the Gnostics of former ages really made all the objections you have mentioned ; I take it for granted, upon your authority, that they did : but I am certain, if they did, that the Gnostics of modern times have no reason to be puffed up with their knowledge, or to be held in admiration as men of subtle penetration or refined erudition : they are all miserable copiers of their brethren of antiquity ; and neither Morgan, nor Tindal, nor Bolingbroke, nor Voltaire, have been able to produce scarce a single new objection. You think that the Fathers have not properly answered the Gnostics. I make no question, Sir, you are able to answer them to your own satisfaction, and informed of every thing that has been said by our "industrious divines" upon the subject ; and we should have been glad, if it had fallen in with your plan to have administered together with the poison, its antidote : but, since that is not the case, lest its malignity should spread too far, I must just mention it to my younger readers, that Leland and others, in their replies to the modern deists, have given very full, and, as many learned men apprehend, very satisfactory answers to every one of the objections which you have derived from the Gnostic heresy. I am, &c.

LETTER II.

SIR ;—" The doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth," is the second of the causes to which you attribute the quick increase of Christianity. Now, if we impartially consider the circumstances of the persons to whom the doctrine, not simply of a future life, but of a future life accompanied with punishments as well as rewards ; not only of the immortality of the soul, but of the immortality of the soul accompanied with that of the resurrection, was delivered ; I cannot be of opinion, that, abstracted from the supernatural testimony by which it was enforced, it could have met with any very extensive reception amongst them.

It was not that kind of future life which they expected ; it did not hold out to them the punishments of the infernal regions as *aniles fabulas*. To the question, *Quid si post mortem maneat animi ?* they could not answer with Cicero and the philosophers—*Beatos esse concedo* ; because there was a great probability that it might be quite otherwise with them. I am not to learn, that there are passages to be picked up in the writings of the ancients, which might be produced as proofs of their expecting a future state of punishment for the flagitious ; but this opinion was worn out of credit before the time of our Saviour : the whole disputation in the first book of the Tusculan Questions goes upon the other supposition. Nor was the absurdity of the doctrine of future punishments confined to the writings of the philosophers, or the circles of the learned and polite ; for Cicero, to mention no others, makes no secret of it in his public pleadings before the people at large. You, yourself, Sir, have referred to his oration for Cluentius : in this oration, you may remember, he makes great mention of a very abandoned fellow, who had forged I know not how many wills, murdered I know not how many wives, and perpetrated a thousand other villainies ; yet even to this profligate, by name Oppianicus, he is persuaded that death was not the occasion of any evil.* Hence, I think, we may conclude, that such of the Romans as were not wholly infected with the annihilating notions of Epicurus, but entertained (whether from remote tradition or enlightened argumentation) hopes of a future life, had no manner of expectation of such a life as included in it the severity of punishment denounced in the Christian scheme against the wicked.

Nor was it that kind of future life which they wished : they would have been glad enough of an Elysium, which could have admitted into it men who had spent this life in the perpetration of every vice which can debase and pollute the human heart. To abandon every seducing gratification of sense, to pluck up every latent root of ambition, to subdue every impulse of revenge, to divest themselves of every inveterate habit in which their glory and their pleasure consisted ; to do all this and more, before they could look up to the doctrine of a future life without terror and amazement, was not, one would think, an easy un-

* Nam nunc quidem quid tandem mali illi mors attulit ? nisi forte ineptiis ac fabulis ducimur, ut existimemus apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre, ac plures illic offendisse inimicos quam hic reliquisse—quæ si falsa sint, id quod omnes intelligunt, &c.

dertaking : nor was it likely, that many would forsake the religious institutions of their ancestors, set at naught the gods under whose auspices the capitol had been founded, and Rome made mistress of the world ; and suffer themselves to be persuaded into the belief of a tenet, the very mention of which made Felix tremble, by any thing less than a full conviction of the supernatural authority of those who taught it.

The several schools of Gentile philosophy had discussed, with no small subtlety, every argument which reason could suggest, for and against the immortality of the soul ; and those uncertain glimmerings of the light of nature would have prepared the minds of the learned for the reception of the full illustration of this subject by the Gospel, had not the resurrection been a part of the doctrine therein advanced. But that this corporeal frame, which is hourly mouldering away, and resolved at last into the undistinguished mass of elements from which it was first derived, should ever be "clothed with immortality ; that this corruptible should *ever* put on incorruption ;" is a truth so far removed from the apprehension of philosophical research, so dissonant from the common conceptions of mankind, that amongst all ranks and persuasions of men it was esteemed an impossible thing. At Athens, the philosophers had listened with patience to St. Paul, whilst they conceived him but a "setter forth of strange gods ;" but as soon as they comprehended, that by the *ἀναστάσις* he meant the resurrection, they turned from him with contempt. It was principally the insisting upon the same topic, which made Festus think "that much learning had made him mad." And the questions, "How are the dead raised up ?" and, "With what body do they come ?" seem, by Paul's solicitude to answer them with fullness and precision, to have been not unfrequently proposed to him by those who were desirous of becoming Christians.

The doctrine of a future life, then, as promulged in the Gospel, being neither agreeable to the expectations, nor corresponding with the wishes nor conformable to the reason of the Gentiles, I can discover no motive (setting aside the true one, the divine power of its first preachers,) which could induce them to receive it ; and, in consequence of their belief, to conform their loose morals to the rigid standard of Gospel purity, upon the mere authority of a few contemptible fishermen of Judea. And even you, yourself, Sir, seem to have changed your opinion concerning the efficacy of the expectation of a future life in converting the heathens, when you observe, in the following chapter, that "the pagan multitude, reserving their gratitude for temporal benefits alone, rejected the inestimable present of life and immortality which was offered to mankind by Jesus of Nazareth."

Montesquieu is of opinion, that it will ever be impossible for Christianity to establish itself in China and the East, from the circumstance that it prohibits a plurality of wives. How then could it have been possible for it to have pervaded the voluptuous capital, and traversed the utmost limits of the empire of Rome, by the feeble efforts of human industry, or human knavery ?

But the Gentiles, you are of opinion, were converted by their fears ; and reckon the doctrine of Christ's speedy appearance, of the millennium, and of the general conflagration, amongst those additional circumstances which gave weight to that concerning a future state. Before I proceed to the examination of the efficiency of these several circumstan-

ces in alarming the apprehensions of the Gentiles, what if I should grant your position? Still the main question recurs. From what source did they derive the fears which converted them? Not surely from the mere human labors of men who were everywhere spoken against, made a spectacle of, and considered as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things; not surely from the human powers of him, who professed himself "rude in speech, in bodily presence contemptible," and a despiser of "the excellency of speech, and the enticing words of men's wisdom." No, such wretched instruments were but ill fitted to inspire the haughty and the learned Romans with any other passions than those of pity or contempt.

Now, Sir, if you please, we will consider that universal expectation of the approaching end of the world, which, you think, had such great influence in converting the pagans to the profession of Christianity. The near approach, you say, of this wonderful event had been predicted by the apostles, "though the revolution of seventeen centuries has instructed us not to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation." That this opinion, even in the times of the apostles, had made its way into the Christian church, I readily admit; but that the apostles ever either predicted this event to others, or cherished the expectation of it in themselves, does not seem probable to me. As this is a point of some difficulty and importance, you will suffer me to explain it at some length.

It must be owned, that there are several passages in the writings of the apostles, which, at the first view, seem to countenance the opinion you have adopted. "Now," says St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, "it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand." And in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians he comforts such of them as were sorrowing for the loss of their friends, by assuring them, that they were not lost for ever; but that the Lord, when he came, would bring them with him; and that they would not, in the participation of any blessings, be in anywise behind those who should happen then to be alive: "We," says he (the Christians of whatever age or country, agreeable to a frequent use of the pronoun *we*,) "which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep; for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord." In his Epistle to the Philippians he exhorts his Christian brethren not to disquiet themselves with carking cares about their temporal concerns, from this powerful consideration, that the Lord was at hand: "Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand: be careful about nothing." The apostle to the Hebrews inculcates the same doctrine, admonishing his converts "to provoke one another to love, and to good works; and so much the more, as they saw the day approaching." The age in which the apostles lived is frequently called by them the end of the world, the last days, the last hour. I think it unnecessary, Sir, to trouble you with an explication of these and other similar texts of Scripture, which are usually adduced in support of your opinion; since I hope to be able to give you a direct proof, that the apostles neither

comforted themselves, nor encouraged others, with the delightful hope of seeing their master coming again into the world. It is evident, then, that St. John, who survived all the other apostles, could not have had any such expectation; since, in the book of the Revelation, the future events of the Christian church, which were not to take place, many of them, till a long series of years after his death, and some of which have not yet been accomplished, are there minutely described. St. Peter, in like manner, strongly intimates, that the day of the Lord might be said to be at hand, though it was at the distance of a thousand years or more; for in replying to the taunt of those who did then, or should in future ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" he says, "Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day: The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." And he speaks of putting off his tabernacle, as the Lord had showed him; and of his endeavor, that the Christians after his decease might be able to have these things in remembrance: so that it is past a doubt, he could not be of opinion, that the Lord would come in his time. As to St. Paul, upon a partial view of whose writings the doctrine concerning the speedy coming of Christ is principally founded, it is manifest, that he was conscious he should not live to see it, notwithstanding the expression before-mentioned, "we which are alive;" for he foretells his own death in express terms: "The time of my departure is at hand;" and he speaks of his reward, not as immediately to be conferred upon him, but as laid up, and reserved for him till some future day. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." There is, moreover, one passage in his writings, which is so express, and full to the purpose, that it will put the matter, I think, beyond all doubt; it occurs in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: they, it seems, had, either by misinterpreting some parts of his former letter to them, or by the preaching of some, who had not the spirit of truth; by some means or other, they had been led to expect the speedy coming of Christ, and been greatly disturbed in mind upon that account. To remove this error, he writes to them in the following very solemn and affectionate manner: "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is at hand; let no man deceive you by any means." He then goes on to describe a falling away, a great corruption of the Christian church, which was to happen before the day of the Lord. Now, by this revelation of the man of sin, this mystery of iniquity, which is to be consumed with the spirit of his mouth, destroyed by the brightness of his coming, we have every reason to believe, is to be understood the past and present abominations of the church of Rome. How then can it be said of Paul, who clearly foresaw this corruption above seventeen hundred years ago, that he expected the coming of the Lord in his own day? Let us press, Sir, the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation as closely as you please; but let us press it truly: and we may, perhaps, find reason from thence to receive, with less reluctance, a religion, which describes a corruption, the strangeness of which, had it

not been foretold in unequivocal terms, might have amazed even a friend to Christianity.

I will produce you, Sir, a prophecy, which, the more closely you press it, the more reason you will have to believe, that the speedy coming of Christ could never have been "predicted" by the apostles. Take it, as translated by Bishop Newton: "But the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall apostatize from the faith; giving heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons, through the hypocrisy of liars; having their conscience seared with a red-hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats." Here you have an express prophecy; the Spirit hath spoken it; that in the latter times, not immediately, but at some distant period, some should apostatize from the faith; some, who had been Christians, should in truth be so no longer, but should give heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons. Press this expression closely, and you may, perhaps, discover in it the erroneous tenets, and the demon or saint worship, of the church of Rome. Through the hypocrisy of liars: you recognize, no doubt, the priesthood, and the martyrologists. Having their conscience seared with a red-hot iron: callous, indeed, must his conscience be, who traffics in indulgence. Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats: this language needs no pressing; it discovers, at once, the unhappy votaries of monastic life, and the mortal sin of eating flesh on fast days.

If, notwithstanding what has been said, you should still be of opinion, that the apostles expected Christ would come in their time; it will not follow, that this their error ought in any wise to diminish their authority as preachers of the Gospel. I am sensible this position may alarm even some well-wishers to Christianity; and supply its enemies with what they will think an irrefragable argument. The apostles, they will say, were inspired with the spirit of truth; and yet they fell into a gross mistake, concerning a matter of great importance; how is this to be reconciled? Perhaps, in the following manner:—When the time of our Saviour's ministry was nearly at an end, he thought proper to raise the spirits of his disciples, who were quite cast down with what he had told them about his design of leaving them; by promising, that he would send to them the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth; who should teach them all things, and lead them into all truth. And we know, that this his promise was accomplished on the day of Pentecost, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost; and we know farther, that from that time forward they were enabled to speak with tongues, to work miracles, to preach the word with power, and to comprehend the mystery of the new dispensation which was committed unto them. But we have no reason from hence to conclude, that they were immediately inspired with the apprehension of whatever might be known; that they became acquainted with all kinds of truth. They were undoubtedly led into such truths as it was necessary for them to know, in order to their converting the world to Christianity; but, in other things, they were probably left to the exercise of their understanding, as other men usually are. But surely they might be proper witnesses of the life and resurrection of Christ, though they were not acquainted with every thing which might have been known; though, in particular, they were ignorant of the precise time when our Lord would come to judge.

world. It can be no impeachment, either of their integrity as men, or their ability as historians, or their honesty as preachers of the Gospel, that they were unacquainted with what had never been revealed to them; that they followed their own understandings where they had no better light to guide them; speaking from conjecture, when they could not speak from certainty; of themselves, when they had no commandment of the Lord. They knew but in part, and they prophesied but in part; and concerning this particular point, Jesus himself had told them, just as he was about finally to leave them, that it was not for them to "know the time and the seasons, which the Father had put in his own power." Nor is it to be wondered at, that the apostles were left in a state of uncertainty concerning the time in which Christ should appear; since beings far more exalted, and more highly favoured of heaven than they, were under an equal degree of ignorance: "Of that day," says our Saviour, "and of that hour, knoweth no one; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." I am afraid, Sir, I have tired you with Scripture quotations; but if I have been fortunate enough to convince you, either that the speedy coming of Christ was never expected, much less "predicted," by the apostles; or that their mistake in that particular expectation can in no degree diminish the general weight of their testimony as historians, I shall not be sorry for the ennui I may have occasioned you.

The doctrine of the Millennium is the second of the circumstances which you produce as giving weight to that of a future state; and you represent this doctrine as having been "carefully calculated by a succession of the fathers, from Justin Martyr and Irenæus, down to Lactantius;" and observe, that when "the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside:" and in the notes you refer us, as a proof of what you advance, to "Irenæus, the disciple of Papias, who had seen the apostle St. John," and to the second dialogue of Justin with Trypho.

I wish, Sir, you had turned to Eusebius, for the character of this Papias, who had seen the apostle St. John: you would there have found him represented as little better than a credulous old woman; very averse from reading, but mightily given to picking up stories and traditions next to fabulous; amongst which, Eusebius reckons this of the Millennium one. Nor is it, I apprehend, quite certain, that Papias ever saw, much less discoursed, as seems to be insinuated, with the apostle St. John. Eusebius thinks rather, that it was John the presbyter he had seen. But what if he had seen the apostle himself? Many a weak-headed man had undoubtedly seen him as well as Papias; and it would be hard indeed upon Christians, if they were compelled to receive, as apostolical traditions, the wild reveries of ancient enthusiasm, or such crude conceptions of ignorant fanaticism as nothing but the rust of antiquity can render venerable.

As the works of Justin, the very dialogue you refer to contains a proof, that the doctrine of the Millennium had not, even in his time, the universal reception you have supposed: but, that many Christians of pure and pious principles rejected it. I wonder how this passage escaped you; but it may be that you followed Tillotson, who himself followed Mede, and read in the original *ou* instead of *av*; and thus inwardly violated the idiom of the language, the sense of the context, and

the authority of the best editions.* In the note you observe, that it is unnecessary for you to mention all the intermediate fathers between Justin and Lactantius, as the fact, you say, is not disputed. In a man who has read so many books, and to so good a purpose, he must be capacious indeed, who cannot excuse small mistakes. That unprejudiced regard to truth, however, which is the great characteristic of every distinguished historian, will, I am persuaded, make you thank me for recalling to your memory, that Origin, the most learned of all the fathers, and Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, usually, for his immense erudition, surnamed the Great, were both of them prior to Lactantius, and both of them impugnors of the Millennium doctrine. Look, Sir, into Mosheim, or almost any writer of ecclesiastical history, and you will find the opposition of Origen and Dionysius to this system particularly noticed: look into so common an author as Whitby, and in his learned treatise upon this subject you will find that he has well proved these two propositions: first, that this opinion of the Millennium was never generally received in the church of Christ; secondly, that there is no just ground to think it was derived from the apostles. From hence, I think, we may conclude, that this Millennium doctrine (which, by the by, though it be new-modelled, is not yet thrown aside) could not have been any very serviceable scaffold in the erection of that mighty edifice, which has crushed by the weights of its materials, and debased by the elegance of its structure, the stateliest temples of heathen superstition. With these remarks, I take leave of the Millennium; just observing, that your third circumstance, the general conflagration, seems to be effectually included in your first, the speedy coming of Christ. I am, &c.

LETTER III.

SIR;—You esteem “the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church,” as the third of the secondary causes of the rapid growth of Christianity. I should be willing to account the miracles, not merely ascribed to the primitive church, but really performed by the apostles, as the one great primary cause of the conversion of the Gentiles. But waiving this consideration, let us see whether the miraculous powers, which you ascribe to the primitive church, were in any eminent degree calculated to spread the belief of Christianity, amongst a great and enlightened people.

They consisted, you tell us, “of divine inspirations, conveyed sometimes in the form of a sleeping, sometimes of a waking vision; and were liberally bestowed on all ranks of the faithful, on women as on

* Justin, in answering the question proposed by Trypho, Whether the Christians believed the doctrine of the Millennium, says, *ὁμολογεῖται ὑπὸ σοὶ καὶ προτέρους, ὅτι ἐγὼ καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ ταῦτα φερούμεν, ὡς καὶ παντὶς ἐκείνου, τότε γενομένου. Πᾶσι δ' αὖ καὶ τῶν τῆς ΚΑΘΑΡΑΕ ΚΑΙ ΕΥΣΕΒΟΥΣ αὐτῶν Χριστιανῶν ΓΝΩΜΗΕ τότε μὴ γνωρίζειν, σήματα εἶναι.* The note subjoined to the passage out of Justin, in Thirlby's ed. an. 1732, is [*Πᾶσι δ' αὖ καὶ τῶν τῆς καθαρᾶς.*] *Medus (quem sequitur Tillotsonus, Reg. Fidei per iii. scet. ix. p. 756, & seq.) legit τῶν τῆς καθαρᾶς. Vehementer errant viri proclari.*

And in Jebb's Edit. an. 1719, we have the following note: “*Doctrina itaque de Millennio, neque erat universalis ecclesiae traditio, nec opinio de fide recepta.*” &c.

elders, on boys as well as upon bishops." "The design of these visions," you say, "was for the most part either to disclose the future history, or to guide the present administration of the church." You speak of "the expulsion of demons as an ordinary triumph of religion, usually performed in a public manner; and when the patient was relieved by the skill or the power of the exorcist, the vanquished demon was heard to confess that he was one of the fabled gods of antiquity, who had impiously usurped the adoration of mankind;" and you represent even the miracle of the resurrection of the dead as frequently performed on necessary occasions.—Cast your eye, Sir, upon the church of Rome, and ask yourself (I put the question to your heart, and beg you will consult that for an answer; ask yourself,) whether her absurd pretensions to that very kind of miraculous powers you have here displayed as operating to the increase of Christianity, have not converted half her numbers to Protestantism, and the other half to infidelity? Neither the sword of the civil magistrate, nor the possession of the keys of heaven, nor the terrors of her spiritual thunder, have been able to keep within her pale even those who have been bred up in her faith; how then should you think, that the very cause which hath almost extinguished Christianity among Christians, should have established it among Pagans? I beg I may not be misunderstood; I do not take upon me to say, that all the miracles recorded in the history of the primitive church after the apostolical age were forgeries; it is foreign to the present purpose to deliver any opinion upon that subject; but I do beg leave to insist upon this, that such of them as were forgeries must, in that learned age, by their easy detection, have rather impeded than accelerated the progress of Christianity; and it appears very probable to me, that nothing but the recent prevailing evidence of real, unquestioned, apostolical miracles, could have secured the infant church from being destroyed by those which were falsely ascribed to it.

It is not every man who can nicely separate the corruptions of religion from religion itself; nor justly apportion the degrees of credit due to the diversities of evidence; and those who have ability for the task are usually ready enough to emancipate themselves from Gospel restraints (which thwart the propensities of sense, check the ebullitions of passion, and combat the prejudices of the world at every turn), by blending its native simplicity with the superstitions which have been derived from it. No argument is so well suited to the indolence or the immorality of mankind, as that priests of all ages and religions are the same: we see the pretensions of the Romish priesthood to miraculous powers, and we know them to be false; we are conscious, that they at least must sacrifice their integrity to their interest, or their ambition; and being persuaded, that there is a great sameness in the passions of mankind, and in their incentives to action; and knowing that the history of past ages is abundantly stored with similar claims to supernatural authority, we traverse back, in imagination, the most distant regions of antiquity; and finding, from a superficial view, nothing to discriminate one set of men, or one period of time, from another, we hastily conclude, that all revealed religion is a cheat, and that the miracles attributed to the apostles themselves are supported by no better testimony, nor more worthy our attention, than the prodigies of Pagan story, or the lying wonders of Papal artifice. I have no intention, in this place, to enlarge upon the many circumstan-

one by which a candid inquirer after truth might be enabled to distinguish a pointed difference between the miracles of Christ and his apostles, and the tricks of ancient or modern superstition. One observation I would just suggest to you upon this subject: the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament are so intimately united with the narration of common events, and the ordinary transactions of life, that you cannot, as in profane history, separate the one from the other. My meaning will be illustrated by an instance; Tacitus and Suetonius have handed down to us an account of many great actions performed by Vespasian; amongst the rest, they inform us of his having wrought some miracles, of his having cured a lame man, and restored sight to one that was blind. But what they tell us of these miracles is so unconnected with every thing that goes before and after, that you may reject the relation of them without injuring, in any degree, the consistency of the narration of the other circumstances of his life: on the other hand; if you reject the relation of the miracles said to have been performed by Jesus Christ, you must necessarily reject the account of his whole life, and of several transactions, concerning which we have the undoubted testimony of other writers besides the evangelists. But if this argument should not strike you, perhaps the following observation may tend to remove a little of the prejudice usually conceived against Gospel miracles, by men of lively imaginations, from the gross forgeries attributed to the first ages of the church.

The phenomena of physics are sometimes happily illustrated by an hypothesis; and the most recondite truths of mathematical science not unfrequently investigated from an absurd position: what if we try the same method of arguing in the case before us? Let us suppose, then, that a new revelation was to be promulged to mankind; and that twelve unlearned and unfriended men, inhabitants of any country most odious and despicable in the eyes of Europe, should by the power of God be endowed with the faculty of speaking languages they had never learned, and performing works surpassing all human ability; and that, being strongly impressed with a particular truth, which they were commissioned to promulgate, they should travel, not only through the barbarous regions of Africa, but through all the learned and polished states of Europe; preaching every where with unremitting sedulity a new religion, working stupendous miracles in attestation of their mission, and communicating to their first converts (as a seal of their conversion) a variety of spiritual gifts: does it appear probable to you, that after the death of these men, and probably after the deaths of most of their immediate successors, who had been zealously attached to the faith they had seen so miraculously confirmed, that none would ever attempt to impose upon the credulous or the ignorant, by a fictitious claim to supernatural powers? would none of them aspire to the gift of tongues? would none of them mistake frenzy for illumination, and the delusions of a heated brain for the impulses of the Spirit? would none undertake to cure inveterate disorders, to expel demons, or to raise the dead? As far as I can apprehend, we ought, from such a position, to deduce, by every rule of probable reasoning, the precise conclusion, which was in fact verified in the case of the apostles; every species of miracles, which Heaven had enabled the first preachers to perform, would be counterfeited, either from misguided zeal or interested cunning, either through

ne imbecility or the iniquity of mankind; and we might just as reasonably conclude, that there never was any piety, charity, or chastity in the world, from seeing such plenty of pretenders to these virtues, as that there never were any real miracles performed, from considering the great store of those which have been forged.

But, I know not how it has happened, there are many in the present age (I am far from including you, Sir, in the number), whose prejudices against all miraculous events have arisen to that height, that it appears to them utterly impossible for any human testimony, however great, to establish their credibility. I beg pardon for styling their reasoning, prejudice; I have no design to give offence by that word; they may, with equal right, throw the same imputation upon mine; and I think it just as illiberal in divines to attribute the scepticism of every deist to wilful infidelity, as it is in the deists to refer the faith of every divine to professional bias. I have not had so little intercourse with mankind, or shunned so much the delightful freedom of social converse, as to be ignorant, that there are many men of upright morals and good understandings, to whom, as you express it, "a latent and even involuntary scepticism adheres;" and who would be glad to be persuaded to be Christians: and how severe soever some men may be in their judgments concerning one another; yet we Christians, at least, hope and believe, that the great Judge of all will make allowance for "our habits of study and reflection," for various circumstances, the efficacy of which, giving a particular bent to the understandings of men, we can neither comprehend nor estimate. For the sake of such men, if such should ever be induced to throw an hour away in the perusal of these Letters, suffer me to step for a moment out of my way, whilst I hazard an observation or two upon the subject.

Knowledge is rightly divided by Mr. Locke into intuitive, sensitive, and demonstrative. It is clear, that a past miracle can neither be the object, of sense nor of intuition, nor consequently of demonstration: we cannot then, philosophically speaking, be said to know, that a miracle has ever been performed. But, in all the great concerns of life, we are influenced by probability rather than knowledge: and of probability, the same great author establishes two foundations; a conformity to our own experience, and the testimony of others. Now it is contended, that by the opposition of these two principles probability is destroyed; or, in other terms, that human testimony can never influence the mind to assent to a proposition repugnant to uniform experience.—Whose experience do you mean? You will not say, your own; for the experience of an individual reaches but a little way; and, no doubt, you daily assent to a thousand truths in politics, in physics, and in the business of common life, which you have never seen verified by experience.—You will not produce the experience of your friends; for that can extend itself but a little way beyond your own. But by uniform experience, I conceive, you are desirous of understanding the experience of all ages and nations since the foundation of the world. I answer, first; how is it that you become acquainted with the experience of all ages and nations? You will reply, from history. Be it so: peruse then by far the most ancient records of antiquity; and if you find no mention of miracles in them, I give up the point. Yes; but every thing related therein respecting miracles is to be reckoned fabulous. Why? Because miracles con-

tradict the experience of all ages and nations. Do you not perceive, Sir, that you beg the very question in debate? for we affirm, that the great and learned nation of Egypt, that the heathen inhabiting the land of Canaan, that the numerous people of the Jews, and the nations which, for ages, surrounded them, have all had great experience of miracles. You cannot otherways obviate this conclusion, than by questioning the authenticity of that book, concerning which, Newton, when he was writing his commentary on Daniel, expressed himself to the person* from whom I had the anecdote, and which deserves not to be lost: "I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible, than in any profane history whatsoever."

However, I mean not to press you with the argument *ad verecundiam*; it is needless to solicit your modesty, when it may be possible perhaps, to make an impression upon your judgment: I answer therefore, in the second place, that the admission of the principle by which you reject miracles will lead us into absurdity. The laws of gravitation are the most obvious of all the laws of nature; every person in every part of the globe must of necessity have had experience of them. There was a time when no one was acquainted with the laws of magnetism: these suspend in many instances the laws of gravity: nor can I see, upon the principle in question, how the rest of mankind could have credited the testimony of their first discoverer; and yet to have rejected it, would have been to reject the truth. But that a piece of iron should ascend gradually from the earth, and fly at last with an increasing rapidity through the air; and attaching itself to another piece of iron, or to a particular species of iron ore, should remain suspended, in opposition to the action of its gravity, is consonant to the laws of nature. I grant it; but there was a time when it was contrary, I say not to the laws of nature, but to the uniform experience of all preceding ages and countries; and at that particular point of time, the testimony of an individual, or of a dozen individuals, who should have reported themselves eye-witnesses of such a fact, ought, according to your argumentation, to have been received as fabulous. And what are those laws of nature, which, you think, can never be suspended? are they not different to different men, according to the diversities of their comprehension and knowledge? and if any of them (that, for instance, which rules the operations of magnetism or electricity) should have been known to you or to me alone, whilst all the rest of the world were unacquainted with it; the effects of it would have been new, and unheard of in the annals, and contrary to the experience of mankind; and therefore ought not, in your opinion, to have been believed. Nor do I understand what difference, as to credibility, there could be between the effects of such an unknown law of nature, and a miracle; for it is a matter of no moment, in that view, whether the suspension of the known laws of nature be effected, that is, whether a miracle be performed, by the mediation of other laws that are unknown, or by the ministry of a person divinely commissioned; since it is impossible for us to be certain, that it is contradictory to the constitution of the universe, that the laws of nature, which appear to us general, should not be suspended, and their action overruled by others, still more general though less known; that is, that miracles should not be performed before such a being as man, at those times, in those places, and under those circumstances, which God, in his universal providence, had preordained. I am, &c.

* Dr. Smith, late Master of Trinity College.

LETTER IV.

SIR ;—I readily acknowledge the utility of your fourth cause, “the virtues of the first Christians,” as greatly conducing to the spreading of their religion ; but then you seem to quite mar the compliment you pay them, by representing their virtues as proceeding either from their repentance for having been the most abandoned sinners, or from the laudable desire of supporting the reputation of the society in which they were engaged.

That repentance is the first step to virtue, is true enough ; but I see no reason for supposing, according to the calumnies of Celsus and Julian, “that the Christians allured into their party men who washed away in the waters of baptism the guilt for which the temples of the gods refused to grant them any expiation.” The apostles, Sir, did not, like Romulus, open an asylum for debtors, thieves, and murderers ; for they had not the same sturdy means of securing their adherents from the grasp of civil power ; they did not persuade them to abandon the temples of the gods, because they could there obtain no expiation for their guilt, but because every degree of guilt was expiated in them with too great facility : and every vice practised, not only without remorse of private conscience, but with the powerful sanction of public approbation.

“After the example,” you say, “of their Divine Master, the Missionaries of the Gospel addressed themselves to men, and especially to women, oppressed by the consciousness, and very often by the effects, of their vices.”—This, Sir, I really think, is not a fair representation of the matter ; it may catch the applause of the unlearned, embolden many a stripling to cast off for ever the sweet blush of modesty, confirm many a dissolute veteran in the practice of his impure habits, and suggest great occasion of merriment and wanton mockery to the flagitious of every denomination and every age ; but still it will want that foundation of truth, which alone can recommend it to the serious and judicious. The apostles, Sir, were not like the Italian *Fratricelli* of the thirteenth, nor the French *Turlupins* of the fourteenth century ; in all the dirt that has been raked up against Christianity, even by the worst of its enemies, not a speck of that kind have they been able to fix, either upon the apostles, or their Divine Master. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, Sir, was not preached in single houses or obscure villages, not in subterraneous caves and impure brothels, not in lazars and in prisons ; but in the synagogues and in the temples, in the streets and the market places of the great capitals of the Roman provinces ; in Jerusalem, in Corinth, and in Antioch, in Athens, in Ephesus, and in Rome. Nor do I anywhere find, that its missionaries were ordered particularly to address themselves to the shameless women you mention ; I do indeed find the direct contrary ; for they were ordered to turn away from, to have no fellowship or intercourse with such as were wont “to creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.” And what if a few women, who had either been seduced by their passions, or had fallen victims to the licentious manners of their age, should be found amongst those who were most ready to receive a religion that forbade all

impurity? I do not apprehend that this circumstance ought to bring an insinuation of discredit, either upon the sex, or upon those who wrought their reformation.

That the majority of the first converts to christianity were of an inferior condition in life may readily be allowed; and you yourself have in another place given a good reason for it; those who are distinguished by riches, honors, or knowledge, being so very inconsiderable in number when compared with the bulk of mankind: but though not many mighty, not many noble were called; yet some mighty, and some noble, some of as great reputation as any of the age in which they lived, were attached to the Christian faith. Short indeed are the accounts, which have been transmitted to us, of the first propagating of Christianity; yet even in these we meet with the names of many, who would have done credit to any cause: I will not pretend to enumerate them all; a few of them will be sufficient to make you recollect, that there were, at least, some converts to Christianity, both from among the Jews and the Gentiles, whose lives were not stained with inextinguishable crimes. Amongst these we reckon Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; Joseph of Arimathea, a man of fortune and a counsellor; a nobleman and a centurion of Capernaum; Jairus, Crispus, Sosthenes, rulers of synagogues; Apollos, an eloquent and learned man; Zenas, a Jewish lawyer; the treasurer of Candace, queen of Æthiopia; Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band; Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus at Athens; and Sergius Paulus, a man of proconsular or prætorian authority, of whom it may be remarked, that if he resigned his high and lucrative office, in consequence of his turning Christian, it is a strong presumption in its favor; if he retained it, we may conclude, that the profession of Christianity was not so utterly incompatible with the discharge of the offices of civil life as you sometimes represent it. This catalogue of men of rank, fortune, and knowledge, who embraced Christianity, might, was it necessary, be much enlarged; and probably another conversation with St. Paul would have enabled us to grace it with the names of Festus, and king Agrippa himself: not that the writers of the books of the New Testament seem to have been at all solicitous in mentioning the great or the learned men who were converted to the faith; had that been part of their design, they would, in the true style of impostors, have kept out of sight the publicans and sinners, the tanners and the tentmakers, with whom they conversed and dwelt; and introduced to our notice none but those who had been "brought up with Herod, or the chief men of Asia"—whom they had the honor to number amongst their friends.

That the primitive Christians took great care to have an unsullied reputation, by abstaining from the commission of whatever might tend to pollute it, is easily admitted; but we do not so easily grant, that this care is a "circumstance which usually attends small assemblies of men, when they separate themselves from the body of a nation or the religion to which they belonged." It did not attend the Nicolaitanes, the Simonians, the Menandrians, and the Carpocratians in the first ages of the church, of which you are speaking; and it cannot be unknown to you, Sir, that the scandalous vices of these very early sectaries brought a general and undistinguished censure upon the Christian name; and, so far from promoting the increase of the church, excited in the minds of the Pagans an abhorrence of whatever respected it; it cannot be un-

own to you, Sir, that several sectaries both at home and abroad might mentioned, who have departed from the religion to which they belonged; and which, unhappily for themselves and the community, have given as little care to preserve their reputation unspotted as those of the first and second centuries. If, then, the first Christians did take the course you mention (and I am wholly of your opinion in that point) their conduct might as candidly, perhaps, and as reasonably be derived from a sense of their duty, and an honest endeavor to discharge it, as from a mere desire of increasing the honor of their confraternity by the strict integrity of its members.

You are eloquent in describing the austere morality of the primitive Christians, as adverse to the propensities of sense, and abhorrent from the innocent pleasures and amusements of life; and you enlarge, with a studied minuteness, upon their censures of luxury, and their sentiments concerning marriage and chastity: but in this circumstantial enumeration of their errors or their faults (which I am under no necessity of denying or excusing) you seem to forget the very purpose for which you profess to have introduced the mention of them; for the picture you have drawn is so hideous, and the coloring so dismal, that instead of alluring to a closer inspection, it must have made every man of sense or of sense turn from it with horror or disgust; and so far from contributing to the rapid growth of Christianity by the austerity of their manners, it must be a wonder to any one, how the first Christians ever made a single convert. It was first objected by Celsus, that Christianity was a mean religion, inculcating such a pusillanimity and patience under wrongs, such a contempt of riches and worldly honors, as must weaken the nerves of civil government, and expose a society of Christians to the prey of the first invaders. This objection has been repeated by many; and though fully answered by Bernard and others, it is still the favorite theme of every *esprit fort* of our own age: even you, Sir, think of the aversion of Christians to the business of war and government, of the criminal disregard to the public welfare." To all that has been said upon this subject it may with justice, I think, be answered, that Christianity troubles not itself with ordering the constitutions of civil societies, but levels the weight of all its influence at the hearts of the individuals which compose them; and, as Origin said to Celsus, was every individual in every nation a Gospel Christian, there would be neither internal injustice, nor external war; there would be none of those passions which embitter the intercourse of civil life, and desolate the globe. What reproach then can it be to a religion, that it inculcates doctrines, which, if universally practised, would introduce universal tranquillity, and the most exalted happiness amongst mankind?

It must proceed from a total misapprehension of the design of the Christian dispensation, or from a very ignorant interpretation of the particular injunctions, forbidding us to make riches or honors a primary pursuit, or the prompt gratification of revenge a first principle of action, to infer, that an individual Christian is obliged by his religion to offer his throat to an assassin, and his property to the first plunderer, or that a society of Christians may not repel, in the best manner they are able, the unjust assaults of hostile invasion.

I know of no precepts in the Gospel, which debar a man from the

possession of domestic comforts, or deaden the activity of his private friendships, or prohibit the exertion of his utmost ability in the service of the public : the *nisi quietum nihil beatum* is no part of the Christian's creed: his virtue is an active virtue ; and we justly refer to the school of Epicurus the doctrines concerning abstinence from marriage, from the cultivation of friendship, from the management of public affairs, as suited to that selfish indolence which was the favorite tenet of his philosophy. I am, &c.

LETTER V.

SIR;—"The union and the discipline of the Christian church," or, as you are pleased to style it, of the Christian republic, is the last of the five secondary causes, to which you have referred the rapid and extensive spread of Christianity. It must be acknowledged, that union essentially contributes to the strength of every association, civil, military, and religious ; but, unfortunately for your argument, and much to the reproach of Christians, nothing has been more wanting amongst them, from the apostolic age to your own, than union. "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ," are expressions of disunion, which we meet with in the earliest period of church history : and we cannot look into the writings of any, either friend or foe to Christianity, but we find the one of them lamenting, and the other exulting in an immense catalogue of sectaries ; and both of them thereby furnishing us with great reason to believe, that the divisions with respect to doctrine, worship, and discipline, which have ever subsisted in the church, must have greatly tended to hurt the credit of Christianity, and to alienate the minds of the Gentiles from the reception of such a various and discordant faith.

I readily grant, that there was a certain community of doctrine, an intercourse of hospitality, and a confederacy of discipline established amongst the individuals of every church ; so that none could be admitted into any assembly of Christians, without undergoing a previous examination into his manner of life* (which shows, by the by, that every reprobate could not, as the fit seized him, or his interest induced him, become a Christian,) and without protesting in the most solemn manner, that he would neither be guilty of murder, nor adultery, nor theft, nor perfidy ; and it may be granted also, that those, who broke this compact, were ejected by common consent from the confraternity into which they had been admitted: it may be farther granted, that this confederacy extended itself to independent churches ; and that those who had, for their immoralities, been excluded from Christian community in any one church, were rarely, if ever, admitted to it by another ; just as a member who has been expelled any one college in a university, is generally thought unworthy of being admitted by any other : but it is not admitted, that this severity and this union of discipline could ever have induced

* Nonnulli præpositi sunt, qui in vitam et mores eorum, qui admittuntur, inquirent, ut non concessa facientes candidatos religionis arceant a suis conventibus.—Orig. con. Cels. lib. ii.

the Pagans to forsake the gods of their country, and to expose themselves to the contemptuous hatred of their neighbors, and to all the severities of persecution, exercised with unrelenting barbarity, against the Christians.

The account you give of the origin and progress of episcopal jurisdiction, of the pre-eminence of the metropolitan churches, and of the ambition of the Roman pontiff, I believe to be in general accurate and true ; and I am not in the least surprised at the bitterness which now and then escapes you in treating this subject : for to see the most benign religion, that imagination can form, becoming an instrument of oppression ; and the most humble one administering to the pride, and the avarice, and the ambition of those who wished to be considered as its guardians, and who avowed themselves its professors, would extort a censure from men more attached probably to church authority than yourself : not that I think it either a very candid, or a very useful undertaking, to be solely and industriously engaged in portraying the characters of the professors of Christianity in the worst colors : it is not candid, because "the great law of impartiality, which obliges an historian to reveal the imperfections of the uninspired teachers and believers of the Gospel," obliges him also not to conceal, or to pass over with niggard and reluctant mention, the illustrious virtues of those who gave up fortune and fame, all their comforts, and all their hopes in this life, nay, life itself, rather than violate any one of the precepts of that Gospel, which, from the testimony of inspired teachers, they conceived they had good reason to believe : it is not useful, because "to a careless observer," (that is, to the generality of mankind) "*their* faults may seem to cast a shade on the faith which they professed ;" and may really infect the minds of the young and unlearned especially, with prejudices against a religion, upon their rational reception or rejection of which, a matter of the utmost importance may (believe me, Sir, is may, for aught you or any person else can prove to the contrary) entirely depend. It is an easy matter to amuse ourselves and others with the immoralities of priests and the ambition of prelates, with the absurd virulence of synods and councils, with the ridiculous doctrines which visionary enthusiasts or interested churchmen have sanctified with the name of Christian : but a display of ingenuity or erudition upon such subjects is much misplaced ; since it excites, almost in every person, an unavoidable suspicion of the purity of the source itself, from which such polluted streams have been derived. Do not mistake my meaning ; I am far from wishing that the clergy should be looked up to with a blind reverence, or their imperfections screened by the sanctity of their functions, from the animadversion of the world ; quite the contrary : their conduct, I am of opinion, ought to be more nicely scrutinized, and their deviation from the rectitude of the Gospel more severally censured, than that of other men ; but great care should be taken, not to represent *their* vices, or *their* indiscretion, as originating in the principles of their religion. Do not mistake me : I am not here begging quarters for Christianity ; or contending, that even the principles of our religion should be received with implicit faith ; or that every objection to Christianity should be stifled, by a representation of the mischief it might do if publicly promulged ; on the contrary, we invite, nay, we challenge you, to a direct and liberal attack ; though oblique glances, and disingenuous insinuations, we are willing to avoid ;

well knowing, that the character of our religion, like that of an honest man, is defended with greater difficulty against the suggestions of ridicule, and the secret malignity of pretended friends, than against positive accusations, and the avowed malice of open enemies.

In your account of the primitive church you set forth, that "the want of discipline and human learning was supplied by the occasional assistance of the prophets; who were called to that function without distinction of age, sex, or natural abilities."—That the gift of prophecy was one of the spiritual gifts by which some of the first Christians were enabled to co-operate with the apostles in the general design of preaching the Gospel; and that this gift, or rather, as Mr. Locke thinks, the gift of tongues (by the ostentation of which, many of them were prompted to speak in their assemblies at the same time,) was the occasion of some disorder in the church of Corinth, which required the interposition of an apostle to compose, is confessed on all hands. But if you mean, that the prophets were ever the sole pastors of the faithful; or that no provision was made by the apostles for the good government and edification of the church, except what might be accidentally derived from the occasional assistance of the prophets, you are much mistaken; and have undoubtedly forgot what is said of Paul and Barnabas having ordained elders in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch; and of Paul's commission to Titus, whom he had left in Crete, to ordain elders in every city; and of his instructions both to him and Timothy, concerning the qualifications of those whom they were to appoint bishops; one of which was, that a bishop should be able, by sound doctrine, to exhort and to convince the gainsayer. Nor is it said, that this sound doctrine was to be communicated to the bishop by prophecy, or that all persons, without distinction, might be called to that office; but a bishop was "to be able to teach," not what he had learned by prophecy, but what Paul had publicly preached; "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." And in every place almost, where prophets are mentioned, they are joined with apostles and teachers, and other ministers of the Gospel; so that there is no reason for your representing them as a distinct order of men, who were by their occasional assistance to supply the want of discipline and human learning in the church. It would be taking too large a field to inquire, whether the prophets you speak of were endowed with ordinary or extraordinary gifts; whether they always spoke by the immediate impulse of the Spirit, or according to "the analogy of faith;" whether their gift consisted in the foretelling of future events, or in the interpreting of Scripture to the edification and exhortation and comfort of the church, or in both; I will content myself with observing, that he will judge very improperly concerning the prophets of the apostolic church, who takes his idea of their office or importance from your description of them.

In speaking of the community of goods, which, you say, was adopted for a short time in the primitive church, you hold as inconclusive the arguments of Mosheim; who has endeavored to prove, that it was a community quite different from that recommended by Pythagoras or Plato; consisting principally in a common use, derived from an unbounded liberality, which induced the opulent to share their riches with their indigent brethren. There have been others, as well as Mosheim,

who have entertained this opinion ; and it is not quite so indefensible as you represent it : but whether it be reasonable or absurd, need not now be examined ; it is far more necessary to take notice of an expression which you have used, and which may be apt to mislead unwearied readers into a very injurious suspicion concerning the integrity of the apostles. In process of time, you observe, " the converts who embraced the new religion were permitted to retain the possession of their patrimony."—This expression, " permitted to retain," in ordinary acceptation, implies an antecedent obligation to part with : now, Sir, I have not the shadow of a doubt in affirming, that we have no account in Scripture of any such obligation being imposed upon the converts to Christianity, either by Christ himself, or by his apostles, or by any other authority ; nay, in the very place where this community of goods is treated of, there is an express proof (I know not how your impartiality has happened to overlook it) to the contrary. When Peter was about to inflict an exemplary punishment upon Ananias (not for keeping back a part of the price, as some men are fond of representing it, but) for his lying and hypocrisy, in offering a part of the price of his land as the whole of it ; he said to him, " Whilst it remained (unsold) was it not thine own ? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power ?" From this account it is evident, that Ananias was under no obligation to part with his patrimony ; and after he had parted with it, the price was in his own power : the apostle would have " permitted him to retain" the whole of it, if he had thought fit ; though he would not permit his prevarication to go unpunished.

You have remarked, that " the feasts of love, the *agapæ*, as they were called, constituted a very pleasing and essential part of public worship."—Lest any one should from hence be led to suspect, that these feasts of love, this pleasing part of the public worship of the primitive church, resembled the unhallowed meetings of some impure sectaries of our own times, I will take the liberty to add to your account a short explication of the nature of these *agapæ*. Tertullian, in the 39th chapter of his *Apology*, has done it to my hands. " The nature of our supper," says he, " is indicated by its name ; it is called by a word, which, in the Greek language, signifies *love*. We are not anxious about the expense of the entertainment ; since we look upon that as gain which is expended with a pious purpose, in the relief and refreshment of all our indigent.—The occasion of our entertainment being so honorable, you may judge of the manner of its being conducted : it consists in the discharge of religious duties ; it admits nothing vile, nothing immodest. Before we sit down, prayer is made to God. The hungry eat as much as they desire, and every one drinks as much as can be useful to sober men. We so feast, as men who have their minds impressed with the idea of spending the night in the worship of God ; we so converse, as men who are conscious that the Lord heareth them," &c. Perhaps you may object to this testimony in favor of the innocence of Christian meetings, as liable to partiality, because it is the testimony of a Christian ; and you may, perhaps, be able to pick out, from the writings of this Christian, something that looks like a contradiction of this account : however, I will rest the matter upon this testimony for the present ; forbearing to quote any other Christian writer upon the subject, as I shall in a future Letter produce you a testimony superior to every objection. You speak too of the *agapæ* as an essential part of the public

worship: this is not according to your usual accuracy; for, had they been essential, the edict of a Heathen magistrate would not have been able to put a stop to them; yet Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, expressly says, that the Christians left them off, upon his publishing an edict prohibiting assemblies; we know, that in the council of Carthage, in the fourth century, on account of the abuses which attended them, they began to be interdicted, and ceased almost universally in the fifth.

I have but two observations to make upon what you have advanced concerning the severity of ecclesiastical penance: the first is, that even you yourself do not deduce its institution from the Scripture, but from the power which every voluntary society has over its own members; and therefore, however extravagant, or however absurd; however opposite to the attributes of a commiserating God, or the feelings of a fallible man, it may be thought; or upon whatever trivial occasion, such as that you mention of calumniating a bishop, a presbyter, or even a deacon, it may have been inflicted; Christ and his apostles are not answerable for it. The other is, that it was, of all possible expedients, the least fitted to accomplish the end for which you think it was introduced, the propagation of Christianity. The sight of a penitent humbled by a public confession, emaciated by fasting, clothed in sackcloth, prostrated at the door of the assembly, and imploring for years together the pardon of his offences, and a re-admission into the bosom of the church, was a much more likely means of deterring the Pagans from Christian community, than the pious liberality you mention was of alluring them into it. This pious liberality, Sir, would exhaust even your elegant powers of description, before you could exhibit it in the amiable manner it deserves; it is derived from the "new commandment of loving one another;" and it has ever been the distinguishing characteristic of Christians, as opposed to every other denomination of men, Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans. In the times of the apostles, and in the first ages of the church, it showed itself in voluntary contributions for the relief of the poor and the persecuted, the infirm and the unfortunate: as soon as the church was permitted to have permanent possessions in land, and acquired the protection of the civil power, it exerted itself in the erection of hospitals of every kind; institutions these, of charity and humanity, which were forgotten in the laws of Solon and Lycurgus; and for even one example of which, you will, I believe, in vain explore the boasted annals of Pagan Rome. Indeed, Sir, you will think too injuriously of this liberality, if you look upon its origin as superstitious; or upon its application as an artifice of the priesthood, to seduce the indigent into the bosom of the church; it was the pure and uncorrupted fruit of genuine Christianity.

You are much *surprised*, and not a little *concerned*, that Tacitus and the younger Pliny have spoken so slightly of the Christian system; and that Seneca and the elder Pliny have not vouchsafed to mention it at all. This difficulty seems to have struck others, as well as yourself; and I might refer you to the conclusion of the second volume of Dr. Lardner's Collection of Ancient, Jewish, and Heathen Testimonies to the Truth of the Christian Religion, for full satisfaction in this point; but perhaps an observation or two may be sufficient to diminish your surprise.

Obscure sectaries of upright morals, when they separate themselves from the religion of their country, do not speedily acquire the attention of men of letters. The historians are apprehensive of depreciating the dignity of their learned labor, and contaminating their splendid narration of illustrious events, by mixing with it a disgusting detail of religious combinations : and the philosophers are usually too deeply engaged in abstract science, or in exploring the infinite intricacy of natural appearances, to busy themselves with what they, perhaps hastily, esteem popular superstitions. Historians and philosophers, of no mean reputation, might be mentioned, I believe, who were the contemporaries of Luther and the first reformers ; and who have passed over, in negligent or contemptuous silence, their daring and unpopular attempts to shake the stability of St. Peter's chair. Opposition to the religion of a people must become general, before it can deserve the notice of the civil magistrate : and till it does that, it will mostly be thought below the animadversion of distinguished writers. This remark is peculiarly applicable to the case in point. The first Christians, as Christ had foretold, were "hated of all men for his name's sake : " it was the name itself, not any vices adhering to the name, which Pliny punished ; and they were everywhere held in exceeding contempt, till their numbers excited the apprehension of the ruling powers. The philosophers considered them as enthusiasts, and neglected them ; the priests opposed them as innovators, and calumniated them ; the great overlooked them, the learned despised them ; and the curious alone, who examined into the foundation of their faith, believed them. But the negligence of some half dozen of writers (most of them, however, bear incidental testimony to the truth of several facts respecting Christianity), in not relating circumstantially the origin, the progress, and the pretensions of a new sect, is a very insufficient reason for questioning, either the evidence of the principles upon which it was built, or the supernatural power by which it was supported.

The Roman historians, moreover, were not only culpably incurious concerning the Christians, but unpardonably ignorant of what concerned either them or the Jews : I say, unpardonably ignorant ; because the means of information were within their reach : the writings of Moses were everywhere to be had in Greek ; and the works of Josephus were published before Tacitus wrote his history ; and yet even Tacitus has fallen into great absurdity, and self-contradiction, in his account of the Jews ; and though Tertullian's zeal carried him much too far, when he called him *Mendaciorum loquacissimus*, yet one cannot help regretting the little pains he took to acquire proper information upon that subject. He derives the name of the Jews, by a forced interpolation, from mount Ida in Crete ;* and he represents them as abhorring all kinds of images in public worship, and yet accuses them of having placed the image of an ass in the holy of holies : and presently after he tells us, that Pompey, when he profaned the temple, found the sanctuary entirely empty. Similar inaccuracies might be noticed in Plutarch, and other writers who have spoken of the Jews ; and you yourself have referred to an obscure passage in Seutonius, as offering a proof how strangely the Jews and Christians of Rome were confounded with each other. Why, then,

* *Idæum in Crete Idæos montem, accolæ Idæos aucto in barbarum cognomento Judæos vocitari.* Tac. Hist. lib. 5, sub. init.

should we think it remarkable, that a few celebrated writers, who looked upon the Christians as an obscure sect of the Jews, and upon the Jews as a barbarous and detested people, whose history was not worth the perusal, and who were moreover engaged in the relation of the great events which either occasioned or accompanied the ruin of their eternal empire ; why should we be surprised, that men occupied in such interesting subjects, and influenced by such inveterate prejudices, should have left us but short and imperfect descriptions of the Christian system ?

"But how shall we excuse," you say, "the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world, to those evidences, which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses ?" "The laws of nature were perpetually suspended for the benefit of the church : but the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle." To their shame be it spoken, that they did so : "and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world." To this objection I answer, in the first place, that we have no reason to believe that miracles were performed as often as the philosophers deigned to give their attention to them ; or that, at the period of time you allude to, the laws of nature were "perpetually" suspended, for the benefit of the church. It may be, that not one of the few heathen writers, whose books have escaped the ravages of time, was ever present when a miracle was wrought ; but will it follow, because Pliny, or Plutarch, or Galen, or Seneca, or Suetonius, or Tacitus, had never seen a miracle, that no miracles were ever performed ? They, indeed, were learned and observant men ; and it may be a matter of surprise to us, that miracles so celebrated, as the friends of Christianity suppose the Christian ones to have been, should never have been mentioned by them, though they had not seen them ; and had an Adrian or a Vespasian been the authors of but a thousandth part of the miracles you have ascribed to the primitive church, more than one, probably, of these very historians, philosophers as they were, would have adorned his history with the narration of them ; for though they turned aside from the awful spectacle of the miracles of a poor despised apostle ; yet they beheld with exulting complacency, and have related with unsuspecting credulity, the ostentatious tricks of a Roman emperor. It was not for want of faith in miraculous events, that these sages neglected the Christian miracles, but for want of candor and impartial examination.

I answer, in the second place, that in the Acts of the Apostles we have an account of a great multitude of Pagans of every condition of life, who were so far from being inattentive to the evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence to their senses, that they contemplated them with reverence and wonder ; and, forsaking the religion of their ancestors, and all the flattering hopes of worldly profit, reputation, and tranquility, adhered with astonishing resolution to the profession of Christianity. From the conclusion of the Acts, till the time in which some of the sages you mention flourished, is a very obscure part of church history ; yet we are certain, that many of the Pagan, and we have some reason to believe, that not a few of the philosophic world, during that period, did not turn aside from the awful spectacle of miracles, but saw and believed : and that a few others should be found, who probably had never seen, and therefore would not believe, is surely no very extror-

dinary circumstance. Why should we not answer to objections, such as these, with the boldness of St. Jerome; and bid Celsus, and Porphyry, and Julian, and their followers, learn the illustrious characters of the men who founded, built up, and adorned the Christian church?—Why should we not tell them, with Arnobius, of the orators, the grammarians, the rhetoricians, the lawyers, the physicians, the philosophers, “who appeared conscious of the alterations in the moral and physical government of the world;” and from that consciousness, forsook the ordinary occupations of life and study, and attached themselves to the Christian discipline?†

I answer in the last place, that the miracles of Christians were falsely attributed to magic; and were for that reason thought unworthy the notice of the writers you have referred to. Suetonius, in his Life of Nero, calls the Christians, men of a new and magical superstition;‡ I am sensible that you laugh at those “sagacious commentators,” who translate the original word by magical; and, adopting the idea of Mosheim, you think it ought to be rendered mischievous or pernicious: unquestionably it frequently has that meaning; with due deference, however, to Mosheim, and yourself, I cannot help being of opinion, that in this place, as descriptive of the Christian religion, it is rightly translated magical. The Theodosian Code must be my excuse for dissenting from such respectable authority; and in it, I conjecture, you will find good reason for being of my opinion.§ Nor ought any friend to Christianity to be astonished or alarmed at Suetonius applying the word magical to the Christian religion; for the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles principally consisted in alleviating the distresses, by curing the obstinate diseases of human kind; and the proper meaning of magic, as understood by the ancients, is a higher and more holy branch of the art of healing|| The elder Pliny lost his life in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, about forty seven years after the death of Christ: some fifteen years before the death of Pliny, the Christians were persecuted at Rome for a crime, of which every person knew them innocent; but from the description, which Tacitus gives, of the low estimation they were held in at that time (for which, however, he assigns no cause; and therefore we may reasonably conjecture it was the same for which the Jews were everywhere become so odious, an opposition to polytheism,) and of the extreme sufferings they underwent, we cannot be much surprised, that their name is not to be found in the works of Pliny or of Seneca: the sect itself must, by Nero's persecution, have been almost destroyed in Rome; and it would have been uncourtly, not to say unsafe, to have

* Discant Celsus, Porphyrius, Julianus, rabidi adversus Christum canes, discant eorum sectatores, qui putant Ecclesiam nullos Philosophos et eloquentes, nullos habuisse Doctores; quanti et quales viri eam fundaverint, extruxerint, ornaverintque; et dominant fidem nostram rusticæ tantum simplicitatis arguere, suamque potius imperitiam agnoscant.—Jero. Pro. Lib. de Illus. Eccl. Scrip.

† Arnob. con. Gen. lib. xi.

‡ Genii hominum superstitionis novæ et maleficæ. Suet. in Nero. c. xvi.

§ Chaldei, ac Magi, et cæteri quos vulgus maleficos ob facinorum magnitudinem appellat—Si quis magus vel magicis contaminibus adsuetus, qui maleficus vulgi consuetudine nuncupatur. ix. Cod. Theodos. tit. xvi.

|| Pliny, speaking of the origin of magic, says, Natam primum e medicina nemo dubitat, ac specie salutari irrepisse velut altiore sanctioreque medicinam. He afterwards says, that it was mixed with mathematical arts; and thus magi and mathematici are joined by Pliny, as malefici and magici are in the Theodosian Code. Plin. Nat. Hist. Lib. xix. c. i.

noticed an order of men, whose innocence an emperor had determined to traduce, in order to divert the dangerous, but deserved stream of popular censure from himself. Notwithstanding this, there is a passage in the Natural History of Pliny, which, how much soever it may have been overlooked, contains, I think, a very strong allusion to the Christians; and clearly intimates, he had heard of their miracles. In speaking concerning the origin of magic, he says; there is also another faction of magic, derived from the Jews, Moses, and Lotopea, and subsisting at present.* The word faction does not ill denote the opinion the Romans entertained of the religious associations of the Christians;† and a magical faction implies their pretensions, at least, to the miraculous gifts of healing; and its descending from Moses is according to the custom of the Romans, by which they confounded the Christians with the Jews: and its being then subsisting, seems to have a strong reference to the rumors Pliny had negligently heard reported of the Christians.

Submitting each of these answers to your cool and candid consideration, I proceed to take notice of another difficulty in your fifteenth chapter, which some have thought one of the most important in your whole book; the silence of profane historians concerning the preternatural darkness at the crucifixion of Christ. You know, Sir, that several learned men are of opinion, that profane history is not silent upon this subject; I will, however, put their authority for the present quite out of the question. I will neither trouble you with the testimony of Phlegon, nor with the appeal of Tertullian to the public registers of the Romans; but meeting you upon your own ground, and granting you every thing you desire, I will endeavor, from a fair and candid examination of the history of this event, to suggest a doubt, at least, to your mind, whether this was "the greatest phenomenon, to which the mortal eye has been witness, since the creation of the globe."

This darkness is mentioned by three of the four evangelists; St. Matthew thus expresses himself: "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour;" St. Mark says: "And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour;" St. Luke: "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened." The three evangelists agree, that there was darkness; and they agree in the extent of the darkness: for it is the same expression in the original, which our translators have rendered earth in Luke, and land in the two other accounts; and they agree in the duration of the darkness, it lasted three hours. Luke adds a particular circumstance, "that the sun was darkened." I do not know whether this event be anywhere else mentioned in Scripture, so that our inquiry can neither be extensive nor difficult.

In philosophical propriety of speech, darkness consists in the total absence of light, and admits of no degrees; however, in the more common acceptation of the word, there are degrees of darkness, as well as of

* Est et alia magices factio, a Mose etiamnum et Lotopea Judæis pendens. Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. xxx. c. ii. Edit. Hardu. Dr. Lardner and others have made slight mention of this passage, probably from their reading in bad editions *Jamne* for *etiamnum* a Mose et *Jamne* et *Jotape* Judæis pendens.

† Tertullian reckons the sect of the Christians, inter licitas factiones. Ap. c. xxxviii.

light; and as the evangelists have said nothing, by which the particular degree of darkness can be determined, we have as much reason to suppose it was slight, as you have that it was excessive; but if it was slight, though it had extended itself over the surface of the whole globe, the difficulty of its not being recorded by Pliny or Seneca vanishes at once.* Do you not perceive, Sir, upon what a slender foundation this mighty objection is grounded; when we have only to put you upon proving, that the darkness at the crucifixion was of so unusual a nature, as to have excited the particular attention of all mankind, or even of those who were witnesses to it? But I do not mean to deal so logically with you; rather give me leave to spare you the trouble of your proof, by proving or showing the probability at least, of the direct contrary. There is a circumstance mentioned by St. John, which seems to indicate, that the darkness was not so excessive as is generally supposed; for it is probable, that, during the continuance of the darkness, Jesus spoke both to his mother, and to his beloved disciple, whom he saw from the cross; they were near the cross; but the soldiers which surrounded it must have kept them at too great a distance for Jesus to have seen them and known them, had the darkness at the crucifixion been excessive, like the preternatural darkness which God brought upon the land of Egypt; for it is expressly said, that during the continuance of that darkness, "they saw not one another." The expression in St. Luke, "the sun was darkened," tends rather to confirm than to overthrow this reasoning. I am sensible this expression is generally equivalent to another; the sun was eclipsed; but the Bible is open to us all; and there can be no presumption in endeavoring to investigate the meaning of Scripture for ourselves. Luckily for the present argumentation, the very phrase of the sun's being darkened, occurs, in so many words, in one other place (and in only one) of the New Testament; and from that place you may possibly see reason to imagine, that the darkness might not, perhaps, have been so intense as to deserve the particular notice of the Roman naturalists: "And he opened the bottomless pit, and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun was darkened,* and the air, by reason of the smoke of the pit," If we should say, that the sun at the crucifixion was obnubilated, and darkened by the intervention of clouds, as it is here represented to be by the intervention of a smoke like the smoke of a furnace, I do not see what you could object to our account; but such a phenomenon has surely no right to be esteemed the greatest that mortal eye has ever beheld. I may be mistaken in this interpretation; but I have no design to misrepresent the fact, in order to get rid of a difficulty; the darkness may have been as intense as many commentators have supposed it: but neither they nor you can prove it was so; and I am surely under no necessity, upon this occasion, of granting you, out of deference to any commentator, what you can neither prove nor render probable.

* The author of *L'Evangile de la Raison* is mistaken in saying, that the evangelists speak of a thick darkness; and that mistake has led him into another, into a disbelief of the event, because it has not been mentioned by the writers of the times: *Ces historiens* (the Evangelists) *ont le front de nous dire, qu'à sa mort la terre a été couverte d'épaisses ténèbres en plein midi, et en pleine lune; comme si tous les écrivains de ce temps-là n'auoient pas remarqué un si étrange miracle!* *L'Evan. de la Rais.* p. 99.

* — και σκοτισθη ὁ ἥλιος. *Αποκ. ix. 2.*

But you still, perhaps, may think that the darkness, by its extent made up for this deficiency in point of intenseness. The original word, expressive of its extent, is sometimes interpreted by the whole earth; more frequently, in the New Testament, of any little portion of the earth: for we read of the land of Judah, of the land of Israel, of the land of Zabulon; and of the land of Nephtalim; and it may very properly, I conceive, be translated in the place in question by region. But why should all the world take notice of a darkness which extended itself for a few miles about Jerusalem, and lasted but three hours? The Italians, especially, had no reason to remark the event as singular; since they were accustomed at that time, as they are at present, to see the neighboring regions so darkened for days together by the eruptions of *Ætna* and *Vesuvius*, that no man could know his neighbor.* We learn from the Scripture account, that an earthquake accompanied this darkness; and a dark clouded sky, I apprehend, very frequently precedes an earthquake; but its extent is not great, nor is its intenseness excessive, nor is the phenomenon itself so unusual, as not commonly to pass unnoticed in ages of science and history. I fear I may be liable to misrepresentation in this place; but I beg it may be observed, that however slight in degree, or however confined in extent the darkness at the crucifixion may have been; I am of opinion, that the power of God was as supernaturally exerted in its production and in that of the earthquake which accompanied it, as in the opening of the graves, and the resurrection of the saints which followed the resurrection of Christ.

In another place, you seem not to believe "that Pontius Pilate informed the emperor of the unjust sentence of death, which he had pronounced against an innocent person." And the same reason which made him silent as to the death, ought, one would suppose, to have made him silent as to the miraculous events which accompanied it; and if Pilate, in his dispatches to the emperor, transmitted no account of the darkness (how great soever you suppose it to have been) which happened in a distant province; I cannot apprehend, that the report of it could have ever gained such credit at Rome as to induce either Pliny or Seneca to mention it as an authentic fact. I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

SIR:—I mean not to detain you long with my remarks upon your sixteenth chapter; for in a short Apology for Christianity, it cannot be expected that I should apologize at length for the indiscretions of the first Christians. Nor have I any disposition to reap a malicious pleasure from exaggerating, which you have had so much good-natured

* ——— nos autem tenebras cogitemus tantas, quantæ quondam eruptione *Ætnæ* orum ignium *finitimas regiones obcuravisse* dicuntur, ut per biduum nemo hominem homo agnosceret. Cic. de Nat. Deo. lib. ii. And Pliny, in describing the eruption of *Vesuvius*, which suffocated his uncle, says: *Dies alibi, illic nox omnibus noctibus nigrior densiorque.*

pleasure in extenuating, the truculent barbarity of their Roman persecutors.

M. de Voltaire has embraced every opportunity of contrasting the persecuting temper of the Christians with the mild tolerance of the ancient heathens; and I never read a page of his upon this subject without thinking Christianity materially, if not intentionally obliged to him, for his endeavor to depress the lofty spirit of religious bigotry. I may with justice pay the same compliment to you; and I do it with sincerity; heartily wishing, that, in the prosecution of your work, you may render every species of intolerance universally detestable. There is no reason why you should abate the asperity of your invective; since no one can suspect you of a design to traduce Christianity under the guise of a zeal against persecution; or if any one should be so simple, he need but open the Gospel to be convinced, that such a scheme is too palpably absurd to have ever entered the head of any sensible and impartial man.

I wish, for the credit of human nature, that I could find reason to agree with you in what you have said of the "universal toleration of Polytheism; of the mild indifference of antiquity; of the Roman princes beholding without concern, a thousand forms of religion subsisting in peace under their gentle sway." But there are some passages in the Roman History which make me hesitate at least in this point, and almost induce me to believe that the Romans were exceedingly jealous of all foreign religions, whether they were accompanied with immoral manners or not.

It was the Roman custom, indeed, to invite the tutelary gods of the nations, which they intended to subdue, to abandon their charge, and to promise them the same, or even a more august worship, in the city of Rome;* and their triumphs were graced as much with the exhibition of their captive gods, as with the less humane one of their captive kings.† But this custom, though it filled the city with hundreds of gods of every country, denomination, and quality, cannot be brought as a proof of Roman toleration; it may indicate the excess of their vanity, the extent of their superstition, or the refinement of their policy; but it can never show, that the religion of individuals, when it differed from public wisdom, was either connived at as a matter of indifference, or tolerated as an inalienable right of human nature.

Upon another occasion, you, Sir, have referred to Livy as relating the introduction and suppression of the rites of Bacchus; and in that very place we find him confessing, that the prohibiting all foreign religions, and abolishing every mode of sacrifice which differed from the Roman mode, was a business frequently intrusted by their ancestors to the care of the proper magistrates; and he gives this reason for the procedure: that nothing could contribute more effectually to the ruin of religion, than

* In oppugnationibus, ante omnia solitum a Romanis sacerdotibus evocari deum cuius in tutela id oppidum esset; promittique illi eundem, aut ampliorem apud Romanos cultum. Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. xxxviii. c. iv.

† Roma triumphantis quotiens Ducis inclita currum

Plausibus excepit, totiens altaria Divum

Addidit spoliis sibi nova numina fecit.—PRUDEN.

the sacrificing after an external rite, and not after the manner instituted by their fathers.*

Not thirty years before this event, the Prætor, in conformity to a decree of the senate, had issued an edict, that no one should presume to sacrifice in any public place after a new or foreign manner.† And in a still more early period, the ædiles had been commanded to take care that no gods were worshipped except the Roman gods; and that the Roman gods were worshipped after no manner but the established manner of the country.‡

But to come nearer to the times of which you are writing. In Dion Cassius you may meet with a great courtier, one of the interior cabinet, and a polished statesman, in a set speech upon the most momentous subject, expressing himself to the emperor in a manner agreeable enough to the practice of antiquity, but utterly inconsistent with the most remote idea of religious toleration. The speech alluded to, contains, I confess it, nothing more than the advice of an individual; but it ought to be remembered, that that individual was Mæcenas, that the advice was given to Augustus, and that the occasion of giving it was no less important than the settling the form of the Roman government. He recommends it to Cæsar to worship the gods himself according to the established form, and to *force* all others to do the same, and to *hate* and to *punish* all those who should attempt to introduce foreign religions:§ nay, he bids him in the same place, have an eye upon the philosophers also; so that free thinking, free speaking at least, upon religious matters, was not quite so safe under the gentle sway of the Roman princes, as, thank God, it is under the much more gentle government of our own.

In the Edict of Toleration published by Galerius after six years' unremitted persecution of the Christians, we perceive his motive for persecution to have been the same with that which had influenced the conduct of the more ancient Romans, an abhorrence of all innovations in religion. You have favored us with the translation of this edict, in which he says, "we were particularly desirous of reclaiming into the way of reason and nature," *ad bonas mentes* (a good pretence this for a polytheistic persecutor) "the deluded Christians, who had renounced the religion and ceremonies instituted by their fathers;" this is the precise language of Livy, describing a persecution of a foreign religion three hundred years before, "turba erat nec sacrificantium nec precantium deos patrio more." And the very expedient of forcing the Christians to deliver up their religious books, which was practised in this persecution, and which

* Quoties hoc patrum avorumque ætate negotium est magistratibus datum ut sacra externa fieri vetarent? sacrificulos vatesque foro, circo, urbe prohiberent? vaticinos libros conquererent comburerentque? omnem disciplinam sacrificandi, præterquam more Romano, abolerent? Judicabant enim prudentissimi viri omnis divini humanique juris, nihil æque dissolvendæ religionis esse, quam ubi non patrie, sed externo ritu sacrificaretur. Liv. lib. xxxix. c. xvi.

† Ut quicumque libros vaticinos precationesque, aut artem sacrificandi conscriptam haberet, eos libros omnis litterasque ad se ante Kalendas Apriles deferret; neu quis in publico sacro loco, novo aut externo ritu sacrificaret. Liv. lib. xxv. c. i.

‡ Datum inde negotium ædilibus, ut animadverterent, ne qui, nisi Romani dñi, neu quo alio more quam patrio, colerentur, Liv. l. iv. c. xxx.

§ Ταῦτα τε ἐννέκρωται, καὶ προσετι τὸ μὲν θεῶν παντὶ παντὶ αὐτοὶ τε οὐκ, κατὰ τὰ πατρίαν, καὶ τὴν ἄλλαν τιμὰν ἀναγκάζει τὴν δὲ ὅλῃ ξενιστοῦντας τὴν περὶ αὐτοὺς καὶ μισοὶ καὶ κολαῖς. Dion. Cas. lib. lili.

Mosheim attributes to the advice of Hierocles, and you to that of the philosophers of those times, seems clear to me, from the places in Livy before quoted, to have been nothing but an old piece of state policy, to which the Romans had recourse as often as they apprehended their established religion to be in any danger.

In the preamble of the letter of toleration, which the emperor Maximin reluctantly wrote to Sabinus about a year after the publication of Galerius's Edict, there is a plain avowal of the reasons which induced Galerius and Diocletian to commence their persecution; they had seen the temples of the gods forsaken, and were determined by the severity of punishment to reclaim men to their worship.*

In short, the system recommended by Mæcenas, of forcing every person to be of the emperor's religion, and of hating and punishing every innovator, contained no new doctrine; it was correspondent to the practice of the Roman senate, in the most illustrious times of the republic, and seems to have been generally adopted by the emperors in their treatment of Christians, whilst they themselves were Pagans; and in their treatment of Pagans, after they themselves became Christians; and if any one should be willing to derive those laws against heretics (which are so abhorrent from the mild spirit of the Gospel, and so reproachful to the Roman code) from the blind adherence of the Christian emperors to the intolerant policy of their Pagan predecessors, something, I think, might be produced in support of his conjecture.

But I am sorry to have said so much upon such a subject. In endeavoring to palliate the severity of the Romans towards the Christians, you have remarked, "it was in vain that the oppressed believer asserted the inalienable rights of conscience and private judgment." "Though his situation might excite the pity, his arguments could never reach the understanding, either of the philosophic, or of the believing part of the Pagan world." How is this, Sir? are the arguments for liberty of conscience so exceedingly inconclusive, that you think them incapable of reaching the understanding, even of philosophers? A captious adversary would embrace with avidity the opportunity this passage affords him, of blotting your character with the odious stain of being a persecutor; a stain which no learning can wipe out, which no genius or ability can render amiable. I am far from entertaining such an opinion of your principles; but this conclusion seems fairly deducible from what you have said, that the minds of the Pagans were so pre-occupied with the notions of forcing, and hating, and punishing those who differed from them in religion, that arguments for the inalienable rights of conscience, which would have convinced yourself, and every philosopher in Europe, and staggered the resolution of an inquisitor, were incapable of reaching their understandings, or making any impression on their hearts; and you might, perhaps, have spared yourself some perplexity in the investigation of the motives which induced the Roman emperors to persecute, and the Roman people to hate the Christians, if you had not overlooked the true one, and adopted with too great facility the erroneous idea of the extreme tolerance of Pagan Rome.

* Συνείδαν σχεδόν πάντας ανθρώπους, καταλειφθείσης της των θεών θρησκείας, τῷ ἔθνει των Χριστιανῶν αὐτοῦ συμμιχέτους. Ὅρθως διατάσσεται πάντας ανθρώπους τῆς ἀπὸ των θεῶν των ἀπαύτων ἀνεχωρήσαντες, πρὸς δὴλον κολασαί και τιμωρία εἰς τὴν θρησκείαν των θεῶν ἀναλῆθηναι. Euseb. lib. ix. c. 11.

The Christians, you observe, were accused of atheism: and it must be owned that they were the greatest of all atheists, in the opinion of the polytheists; for, instead of Hesiod's thirty thousand gods, they could not be brought to acknowledge above one; and even that one they refused, at the hazard of their lives, to blaspheme with the appellation of Jupiter. But is it not somewhat singular, that the pretensions of the Christians to a constant intercourse with superior beings, in the working of miracles, should have been a principal cause of converting to their faith those who branded them with the imputation of atheism?

They were accused, too, of forming dangerous conspiracies against the state: this accusation, you own, was as unjust as the preceding: but there seems to have been a peculiar hardship in the situation of the Christians, since the very same men, who thought them dangerous to the state, on account of their conspiracies, condemned them, as you have observed, for not interfering in its concerns; for their criminal disregard to the business of war and government, and for their entertaining doctrines, which were supposed "to prohibit them from assuming the character of soldiers, of magistrates, and of princes:" men, such as these, would have made but poor conspirators.

They were accused, lastly, of the most horrid crimes. This accusation, it is confessed, was mere calumny; yet as calumny is generally more extensive in its influence than truth, perhaps this calumny might be more powerful in stopping the progress of Christianity, than the virtues of the Christians were in promoting it; and, in truth, Origen observes, that the Christians, on account of the crimes which were maliciously laid to their charge, were held in such abhorrence, that no one would so much as speak to them. It may be worth while to remark from him, that the Jews, in the very beginning of Christianity, were the authors of all those calumnies, which Celsus afterwards took such great delight in urging against the Christians, and which you have mentioned with such great precision.*

It is no improbable supposition, that the clandestine manner in which the persecuting spirit of the Jews and Gentiles obliged the Christians to celebrate their eucharist, together with the expressions of eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, which were used in its institution, and the custom of imparting a kiss of charity to each other, and of calling each other by the appellations of brother and sister,† gave occasions to their enemies to invent, and induced careless observers to believe, all the odious things which were said against the Christians.

You have displayed at length, in expressive diction, the accusations of the enemies of Christianity; and you have told us of the imprudent defence by which the Christians vindicated the purity of their morals; and you have huddled up in a short note (which many a reader will never see) the testimony of Pliny to their innocence. Permit me to do

* Videtur mihi fecisse idem Celsus, quod Judæi, qui sub Christianismi initium errorem sparsere, quasi ejus sectæ homines mactati pueri vescerentur carnibus; et quod, quoties eis libet operam dare occultis libidibus, extincto lumine constupret, quam quisque nactus fuerit. Quæ falsa et iniqua opinio dudum valde multos a religione nostra alienos tenuit; persuasos, quod tales sint Christiani; et ad hoc temporis nonnullos fallit, qui ea de causa Christianos adversantur, ut nec simplex colloquium cum eis habere velint.—Orig. con. Cels. lib. vi.

† The Romans used these expressions in so impure a sense that Martial calls them Nomina nequiora.—Lib. ii. epig. iv.

the Christians a little justice, by producing in their cause the whole truth.

Between seventy and eighty years after the death of Christ, Pliny had occasion to consult the emperor Trajan concerning the manner in which he should treat the Christians; it seems as if there had been judicial proceedings against them, though Pliny had never happened to attend any of them. He knew, indeed, that men were to be punished for being Christians, or he would not, as a sensible magistrate, have received the accusations of legal, much less of illegal, anonymous informers against them; or would he, before he wrote to the emperor, have put to death those whom his threats could not hinder from persevering in their confession, that they were Christians. His harsh manner of proceeding "in an office the most repugnant to his humanity," had made many apostatize from their profession: persons of this complexion were well fitted to inform him of every thing they knew concerning the Christians; accordingly he examined them; but not one of them accused the Christians of any other crime than of praying to Christ, as to some God, and of binding themselves by an oath, not to be guilty of any wickedness. Not contented with this information, he put two maid servants, which were called ministers, to the torture, but even the rack could not extort from the imbecility of the sex a confession of any crime, any account different from that which the apostates had voluntarily given; not a word do we find of their feasting upon murdered infants, or of their mixing in incestuous commerce. After all his pains, Pliny pronounced the meal of the Christians to be promiscuous and innocent: persons of both sexes of all ages, and of every condition, assembled promiscuously together: there was nothing for chastity to blush at, or for humanity to shudder at in these meetings; there was no secret initiation of proselytes by abhorred rites: but they eat a promiscuous meal in Christian charity, and with the most perfect innocence.*

Whatever faults then the Christians may have been guilty of in after times; though you could produce to us a thousand ambitious prelates of Carthage, or sensual ones of Antioch, and blot ten thousand pages with the impurities of the Christian clergy; yet at this period, whilst the memory of Christ and his apostles was fresh in their minds; or, in the more emphatic language of Jerome, "whilst the blood of our Lord was warm, and recent faith was fervent in the believers;" we have the greatest reason to conclude, that they were eminently distinguished for the probity and the purity of their lives. Had there been but a shadow of a crime in their assemblies, it must have been detected by the industrious search of the intelligent Pliny; and it is a matter of real surprise, that no one of the apostates thought of paying court to the governor by a false testimony; especially, as the apostasy seems to have been exceeding general; since the temples, which had been almost deserted, began again to be frequented; and the victims, for which, a little time before, scarce a purchaser was to be found, be-

* — *affirmabant autem, hanc fuisse summam vel culpe suae, vel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire; carmenque Christo, quasi Deo, dicere secum invicem: seque sacramento non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent: quibus peractis, morem sibi dicensse fuisse, rursusque coeundi ad capiendam cibum promiscuum tamen, et innoxium.* Plin. Epist. xcvi. lib. x.

gan again everywhere to be bought up. This, Sir, is a valuable testimony in our favor, it is not that of a declaiming apologist, of a deluding priest, or of a deluded martyr of an orthodox bishop, or of any "of the most pious of men," the Christians; but it is that of a Roman magistrate, philosopher, and lawyer; who cannot be supposed to have wanted inclination to detect the immoralities or the conspiracies of the Christians; since in his treatment of them, he had stretched the authority of his office, and violated alike the laws of his country and of humanity.

With this testimony I will conclude my remarks: for I have no disposition to blacken the character you have given of Nero; or to lessen the humanity of the Roman magistrates; or to magnify the number of Christians, or of martyrs; or to undertake the defence of a few fanatics, who by their injudicious zeal brought ruin upon themselves, and disgrace upon their profession. I may not probably have convinced you that you are wrong in any thing which you have advanced; or that the authors you have quoted will not support you in the inferences you have drawn from their works; or that Christianity ought to be distinguished from its corruptions: yet I may perhaps have had the good fortune to lessen, in the minds of others, some of that dislike to the Christian religion, which the perusal of your book had unhappily excited. I have touched but upon general topics; for I should have wearied out your patience, to say nothing of my readers', or my own, had I enlarged upon every thing in which I dissent from you; and a minute examination of your work would, moreover, have had the appearance of a captious disposition to descend into illiberal personalities; and might have produced a certain acrimony of sentiment or expression, which may be serviceable in supplying the place of argument, or adding a zest to a dull composition; but has nothing to do with the investigation of truth. Sorry shall I be, if what I have written should give the least interruption to the persecution of the great work in which you are engaged: the world is now possessed of the opinion of us both upon the subject in question; and it may, perhaps, be proper for us both to leave it in this state. I say not this from any backwardness to acknowledge my mistakes, when I am convinced that I am in an error, but to express the almost insuperable reluctance which I feel to the bandying abusive argument in public controversy; it is not, in good truth, a difficult task to chastise the forward petulance of those who mistake personal invective for reasoning, and clumsy banter for ingenuity; but it is a dirty business at best, and should never be undertaken by a man of any temper, except when the interests of truth may suffer by his neglect. Nothing of this nature, I am sensible, is to be expected from you; and if any thing of the kind has happened to escape myself, I hereby disclaim the intention of saying it, and heartily wish it unsaid.

Will you permit me, Sir, through this channel (I may not, perhaps, have another so good an opportunity of doing it,) to address a few words, not to yourself, but to a set of men who disturb all serious company with their profane declamation against Christianity; and who, having picked up in their travels, or in the writings of the Deists, a few flimsy objections, infect with their ignorant and irreverent ridicule the ingenuous minds of the rising generation?

GENTLEMEN,—Suppose the mighty work accomplished, the cross trampled upon, Christianity everywhere proscribed, and the religion of nature once more become the religion of Europe; what advantage will you have derived to your country, or to yourselves, from the exchange? I know your answer, you will have freed the world from the hypocrisy of priests, and the tyranny of superstition. No; you forget that Lycurgus, and Numa, and Odin, and Mango-Copac, and all the great legislators of ancient and modern story, have been of opinion, that the affairs of civil society could not well be conducted without *some* religion; you must of necessity introduce a priesthood, with probably as much hypocrisy; a religion with assuredly more superstition, than that which you now reprobate with such indecent and ill-grounded contempt. But I will tell you from what you will have freed the world; you will have freed it from its abhorrence of vice, and from every powerful incentive to virtue; you will with the religion, have brought back the depraved morality of Paganism; you will have robbed mankind of their firm assurance of another life, and thereby you will have despoiled them of their patience, of their humility, of their charity, of their chastity, of all those mild and silent virtues, which (however despicable they may appear in your eyes) are the only ones which meliorate and sublime our nature; which Paganism never knew, which spring from Christianity alone, which do or might constitute our comfort in this life, and without the possession of which, another life, if after all there should happen to be one, must (unless a miracle be exerted in the alteration of our disposition) be more vicious and more miserable than this is.

Perhaps you will contend, that the universal light of reason, that the truth and fitness of things, are of themselves sufficient to exalt the nature, and regulate the manners of mankind. Shall we never have done with this groundless commendation of natural law? Look into the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and you will see the extent of its influence over the Gentiles of those days; or if you dislike Paul's authority, and the manners of antiquity, look into the more admired accounts of modern voyagers; and examine its influence over the Pagans of our own times, over the sensual inhabitants of Otaheite, over the cannibals of New Zealand, or the remorseless savages of America. But these men are barbarians. Your law of nature, notwithstanding, extends even to them. But they have misused their reason: they have then the more need of, and would be the more thankful for that revelation, which you, with an ignorant and fastidious self-sufficiency, deem useless. But they might of themselves, if they thought fit, become wise and virtuous. I answer with Cicero, "*Ut nihil interest, utrum nemo valeat, an nemo valere possit; sic non intelligo quid intersit, utrum nemo sit sapiens, an nemo esse possit.*"

These, however, you will think, are extraordinary instances; and that we ought not from these to take our measure of the excellency of the law of nature, but rather from the civilized states of China and Japan, or from the nations which flourished in learning and in arts, before Christianity was heard of in the world. You mean to say, that by the law of nature, which you are desirous of substituting in the room of the Gospel, you do not understand those rules of conduct, which an individual, abstracted from the community, and deprived of the institution of man-

kind, could excogitate for himself; but such a system of precepts as the most enlightened men of the most enlightened ages have recommended to our observance. Where do you find this system? We cannot meet with it in the works of Stobæus, or the Scythian Anacharsis; nor in those of Plato, or Cicero; nor in those of the Emperor Antoninus, or the slave Epictetus; for we are persuaded, that the most animated consideration of the *καλόν*, and the *honestum*, of the beauty of virtue, and the fitness of things, are not able to furnish, even a Brutus himself, with permanent principles of action; much less are they able to purify the polluted recesses of a vitiated heart, to curb the irregularity of appetite, or restrain the impetuosity of passion in common men. If you order us to examine the works of Grotius, or Puffendorff, or Burlamaqui, or Hutchinson, for what you understand by the law of nature; we apprehend that you are in a great error, in taking your notions of natural law, as discoverable by natural reason, from the elegant systems of it, which have been drawn up by Christian philosophers; since they have all laid their foundations, either tacitly or expressly, upon a principle derived from revelation; a thorough knowledge of the being and attributes of God: and even those amongst yourselves, who, rejecting Christianity, still continue theists, are indebted to revelation (whether you are either aware of, or disposed to acknowledge the debt, or not) for those sublime speculations concerning the Deity, which you have fondly attributed to the excellency of your own unassisted reason. If you would know the real genius of natural law, and how far it can proceed in the investigation or enforcement of moral duties; you must consult the manners and the writings of those, who have never heard of either the Jewish or the Christian dispensation, or of those other manifestations of himself, which God vouchsafed to Adam and to the patriarchs before and after the flood. It would be difficult perhaps anywhere, to find a people entirely destitute of traditionary notices concerning the Deity, and of traditionary fears or expectations of another life; and the morals of mankind may have, perhaps, been nowhere quite so abandoned as they would have been, had they been left wholly to themselves in these points: however, it is a truth which cannot be denied, how much soever it may be lamented, that tho' the generality of mankind have always had some faint conceptions of God and his providence; yet they have been always greatly inefficacious in the production of good morality, and highly derogatory to his nature, amongst all the people of the earth, except the Jews and Christians; and some may perhaps be desirous of excepting the Mahometans, who derive all that is good in their *Koran* from Christianity.

The laws concerning justice, and the reparation of damages, concerning the security of property, and the performance of contracts; concerning, in short, whatever affects the well-being of civil society, have been everywhere understood with sufficient precision; and if you choose to style Justinian's code, a code of natural law, though you will err against propriety of speech, yet you are so far in the right, that natural reason discovered, and the depravity of human nature compelled human kind to establish by proper sanctions the laws therein contained; and you will have, moreover, Carneades, no mean philosopher, on your side; who knew of no law of nature different from that which men had instituted for their common utility, and which was

various according to the manners of men in different climates, and changeable with a change of times in the same. And, in truth, in all countries where Paganism has been the established religion, though a philosopher may now and then have stepped beyond the paltry pre-script of civil jurisprudence in his pursuit of virtue ; yet the bulk of mankind have ever been contented with that scanty pittance of morality, which enabled them to escape the lash of civil punishment : I call it a scanty pittance, because a man may be intemperate, iniquitous, impious, a thousand ways a profligate and a villain, and yet elude the cognizance, and avoid the punishment of civil laws.

I am sensible, you will be ready to say, what is all this to the purpose ? Though the bulk of mankind may never be able to investigate the laws of natural religion, nor disposed to reverence their sanctions when investigated by others, nor solicitous about any other standard of moral rectitude than civil legislation ; yet the inconveniences which may attend the extirpation of Christianity can be no proof of its truth : I have not produced them as a proof of its truth ; but they are a strong and conclusive proof, if not of its truth, at least of its utility ; and the consideration of its utility may be a motive to yourselves for examining, whether it may not chance to be true ; and it ought to be a reason with every good citizen, and with every man of sound judgment, to keep his opinions to himself, if from any particular circumstances in his studies or in his education, he should have the misfortune to think that it is not true. If you can discover to the rising generation a better religion than the Christian, one that will more effectually animate their hopes, and subdue their passions, make them better men or better members of society, we importune you to publish it for their advantage ; but till you can do that, we beg of you not to give the reins to their passions, by instilling into their unsuspecting minds your pernicious prejudices. Even now, men scruple not, by their lawless lust, to ruin the repose of private families, and to fix a stain of infamy upon the noblest ; even now, they hesitate not in lifting up a murderous arm against the life of their friend, or against their own, as often as the fever of intemperance stimulates their resentment, or the satiety of a useless life excites their despondency : even now, whilst we are persuaded of a resurrection from the dead, and of a *judgment to come*, we find it difficult enough to resist the solicitations of sense, and to escape unspotted from the licentious manners of the world : but what will become of our virtue, what of the consequent peace and happiness of society, if you persuade us that there are no such things ? In two words, you may ruin yourselves by your attempt, and you will certainly ruin your country by your success.

But the consideration of the inutility of your design is not the only one, which should induce you to abandon it ; the argument *a tuto* ought to be warily managed, or it may tend to the silencing our opposition to any system of superstition, which has had the good fortune to be sanctified by public authority : it is, indeed, liable to no objection in the present case ; we do not, however, wholly rely upon its cogency. It is not contended, that Christianity is to be received merely because it is useful, but because it is true. This you deny, and think your objections well grounded : we conceive them originating in your vanity, your immorality, or your misapprehension. There are many worthless doc-

trines, many superstitious observances, which the fraud or folly of mankind have everywhere annexed to Christianity (especially in the church of Rome,) as assential parts of it: if you take these sorry appendages to Christianity for Christianity itself, as preached by Christ, and by the apostles; if you confound the Roman with the Christian religion, you quite misapprehend its nature, and are in a state similar to that of men mentioned by Plutarch, in his Treatise of Superstition; who, flying from superstition, leapt over religion, and sunk into downright atheism.* Christianity is not a religion very palatable to a voluptuous age; it will not conform its precepts to the standard of fashion; it will not lessen the deformity of vice by lenient appellations; but calls keeping, whoredom; intrigue, adultery; and duelling, murder: it will not pander to lust, it will not license the intemperance of mankind; it is a troublesome monitor to a man of pleasure; and your way of life may have made you quarrel with your religion. As to your vanity, as a cause of your infidelity, suffer me to produce the sentiments of M. Bayle upon that head: if the description does not suit your character, you will not be offended at it; and if you are offended with its freedom, it will do you good. "This inclines me to believe, that libertines, like Des-Barreaux, are not greatly persuaded of the truth of what they say. They have made no deep examination; they have learned some few objections, which they are perpetually making a noise with, they speak from a principle of ostentation, and give themselves the lie in the time of danger. Vanity has a greater share in their disputes than conscience; they imagine that the singularity and boldness of the opinions, which they maintain, will give them the reputation of men of parts: by degrees, they get a habit of holding impious discourses; and if their vanity be accompanied by a voluptuous life, their progress in that road is the swifter.†"

The main stress of your objections rests not upon the insufficiency of the external evidence to the truth of Christianity; for few of you, tho' you may become the future ornaments of the senate, or of the bar, have ever employed an hour in its examination; but upon the difficulty of the doctrines contained in the New Testament; they exceed, you say, your comprehension; and you felicitate yourselves, that you are not arrived at the true standard of orthodox faith—*credo quia impossibile*. You think it would be taking a superfluous trouble, to inquire into the nature of the external proofs by which Christianity is established; since in your opinion, the book itself carries with it its own refutation. A gentleman as acute, probably, as any of you, and who once believed, perhaps, as little as any of you, has drawn a quite different conclusion from the perusal of the New Testament: his book (however exceptionable it may be thought in some particular parts) exhibits not only a distinguished triumph of reason over prejudice, of Christianity over deism; but it exhibits, what is

* Le Papisme, (says Helvetius in a posthumous work,) n'est aux yeux d'un homme sensé qu'une pure idolatrie—nous sommes étonnés de l'absurdité de la religion païenne. Celle de la religion Papiste étonnera bien d'avantage un jour la postérité.—We trust, that the day is not at a great distance, and deism will then be buried in the ruins of the church of Rome; for the taking the superstition, the avarice, the ambition, the intolerance of Antichristianism for Christianity, has been the great error upon which infidelity has built its system, both at home and abroad.

† Bayle, Hist. Dict. Art. Des-Barreaux.

infinitely more rare, the character of a man, who has had courage and candor enough to acknowledge it.*

But what if there should be some incomprehensible doctrines in the Christian religion ; some circumstances which in their causes, or their consequences, surpass the reach of human reason ; are they to be rejected on that account ? You are, or would be thought, men of reading, and knowledge, and enlarged understandings ; weigh the matter fairly ; and consider whether revealed religion be not, in this respect, just upon the same footing with every other object of your contemplation. Even in mathematics, the science of demonstration itself, though you get over its first principles, and learn to digest the idea of a point without parts, a line without breadth, and a surface without thickness ; yet you will find yourself at a loss to comprehend the perpetual approximation of lines which can never meet ; the doctrine of incommensurables, and of an infinity of infinites, each infinitely greater, or infinitely less, not only than any finite quantity, but than each other. In physics, you cannot comprehend the primary cause of any thing ; not of the light, by which you see ; nor of the elasticity of the air, by which you hear ; nor of the fire by which you are warmed. In physiology, you cannot tell what first gave motion to the heart ; nor what continues it ; nor why its motion is less voluntary than that of the lungs ; nor why you are able to move your arm to the right or left, by a simple volition ; you cannot explain the cause of animal heat ; nor comprehend the principle by which your body was at first formed, nor by which it is sustained, nor by which it will be reduced to earth. In natural religion you cannot comprehend the eternity or omnipresence of the Deity ; nor easily understand how his prescience can be consistent with your freedom, or his immutability with his government of moral agents ; nor why he did not make all his creatures equally perfect ; nor why he did not create them sooner ; in short, you cannot look into any branch of knowledge, but you will meet with subjects above your comprehension. The fall and the redemption of human kind are not more incomprehensible than the creation and the conservation of the universe ; the infinite Author of the works of providence, and of nature, is equally inscrutable ; equally past our finding out in them both. And it is somewhat remarkable, that the deepest inquirers into nature have ever thought with most reverence, and spoken with most diffidence, concerning those things, which in revealed religion, may seem hard to be understood : they have ever avoided that self sufficiency of knowledge, which springs from ignorance, produces indifference, and ends in infidelity. Admirable to this purpose is the reflection of the greatest mathematician of the present age, when he is combating an opinion of Newton's by an hypothesis of his own, still less defensible than that which he opposes : "Tous les jours que je vois de ces esprits-forts, qui critique les vérités de notre religion, et s'en mocquent meme avec la plus impertinente suffisance, je pense, chetifs mortels ! combien et combien des choses sur lesquelles vous raisonnez si légèrement, sont elles plus sublimes, et plus élevés, que celles sur lesquelles le grand Newton s'égare si grossièrement !†

* See a view of the Internal Evidence, &c. by Soame Jenyns.

† Euler.

Plato mentions a set of men, who were very ignorant, and thought themselves supremely wise; and who rejected the arguments for the being of a God, derived from the harmony and order of the universe, as old and trite.* There have been men it seems in all ages, who, in affecting singularity, have overlooked truth: an argument, however, is not the worse for being old; and surely it would have been a more just mode of reasoning if you had examined the external evidence for the truth of Christianity, weighed the old arguments from miracles, and from prophecies, before you had rejected the whole account from the difficulties you met with in it. You would laugh at an Indian, who in peeping into a history of England, and meeting with the mention of the Thames being frozen, or of a shower of hail, or of snow, should throw the book aside as unworthy of his farther notice, from his want of ability to comprehend these phenomena.

In considering the argument from miracles you will soon be convinced, that it is possible for God to work miracles; and you will be convinced, that it is as possible for human testimony to establish the truth of miraculous, as of physical or historical events: but before you can be convinced that the miracles in question are supported by such testimony as deserves to be credited, you must inquire at what period, and by what persons, the books of the Old and New Testament were composed. If you reject the account without making this examination, you reject it from prejudice, not from reason.

There is, however, a short method of examining this argument, which may, perhaps, make as great an impression on your minds as any other. Three men of distinguished abilities rose up at different times, and attacked Christianity, with every objection which their malice could suggest, or their learning could devise: but neither Celsus in the second century, nor Porphyry in the third, nor the emperor Julian himself in the fourth century, ever questioned the reality of the miracles related in the Gospels. Do but you grant us what these men (who were more likely to know the truth of the matter than you can be) granted to their adversaries, and we will very readily let you make the most of the magic, to which, as the last wretched shift they were forced to attribute them. We can find you men, in our days, who from the mixture of two colorless liquors, will produce you a third as red as blood, or of any other color you desire; *et dicto citius*, by a drop resembling water, will restore the transparency; they will make two fluids coalesce into a solid body; and from the mixture of liquors colder than ice, will instantly raise you a horrid explosion and a tremendous flame: these, and twenty other tricks they will perform, without having been sent with our Saviour to Egypt to learn magic; nay, with a bottle or two of oil they will compose the undulations of a lake; and, by a little art, they will restore the functions of life to a man who has been an hour or two under water, or a day or two buried in the snow: but in vain will these men, or the greatest magician that Egypt ever saw, say to a boisterous sea, Peace, be still; in vain will they say to a carcass rotting in the grave, come forth: the winds and the sea will not obey them, and the putrid carcass will not hear them. You need not suffer yourselves to be deprived of the weight of this argument, from its having been ob-

* De Leg. lib. x.

served, that the fathers have acknowledged the supernatural part of Paganism, since the fathers were in no condition to detect a cheat, which was supported both by the disposition of the people, and the power of the civil magistrate;* and they were from that inability forced to attribute to infernal agency what was too cunningly contrived to be detected, and contrived for too impious a purpose to be credited as the work of God.

With respect to prophecy, you may, perhaps, have accustomed yourselves to consider it as originating in Asiatic enthusiasm, in Chaldean mystery, or the subtle stratagem of interested priests, and have given yourselves no more trouble concerning the predictions of sacred, than concerning the oracles of Pagan history. Or if you have ever cast a glance upon this subject, the dissensions of learned men concerning the proper interpretation of the Revelation, and other difficult prophecies, may have made you rashly conclude, that all prophecies were equally unintelligible, and more indebted for their accomplishment to a fortunate concurrence of events, and the plain ingenuity of the expositor, than to the inspired foresight of the prophet. In all that the prophets of the Old Testament have delivered concerning the destruction of particular cities, and the desolation of particular kingdoms, you may see nothing but shrewd conjectures, which any one acquainted with the history of the rise and fall of empires might certainly have made: and as you would not hold him for a prophet, who should now affirm that London or Paris would afford to future ages a spectacle just as melancholy as that which we now contemplate, with a sigh, in the ruins of Agrigentum or Palmyra; so you cannot persuade yourselves to believe, that the denunciations of the prophets against the haughty cities of Tyre or Babylon, for instance, proceeded from the inspiration of the Deity. There is no doubt, that by some such general kind of reasoning many are influenced to pay no attention to an argument, which, if properly considered carries with it the strongest conviction.

Spinoza said, that he would have broken his atheistic system to pieces, and embraced without repugnance the ordinary faith of Christians, if he could have persuaded himself of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead; and I question not, that there are many disbelievers, who would relinquish their deistic tenets, and receive the Gospel, if they could persuade themselves, that God had ever so far interfered in the moral government of the world as to illumine the mind of any one man with the knowledge of future events. A miracle strikes the senses of the persons who see it; a prophecy addresses itself to the understandings of those who behold its completion; and it requires, in many cases, some learning, in all some attention, to judge of the correspondence of events with the predictions concerning them. No one can be convinced, that what Jeremiah and the other prophets foretold of the fate of Babylon, that it should be besieged by the Medes; that it should be taken, when her mighty men were drunken, when her springs were dried up; and that it should become a pool of water, and should remain desolate for ever; no one, I say, can be convinced, that all these, and other parts of the prophetic denunciation, have been minutely fulfilled, without spending sometime in reading the accounts which profane historians

* See Lord Lyttelton's Observations on St. Paul.

have delivered down to us concerning its being taken by Cyrus; and which modern travellers have given us of its present situation.

Porphry was so persuaded of the coincidence between the prophecies of Daniel and the events, that he was forced to affirm, the prophecies were written after the things prophesied of had happened. Another Porphry has, in our days, been so astonished at the correspondence between the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as related by St. Matthew, and the history of that event, as recorded by Josephus; that, rather than embrace Christianity, he has ventured, (contrary to the faith of all ecclesiastical history, the opinion of the learned of all ages, and all the rules of good criticism) to assert, that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel after Jerusalem had been taken and destroyed by the Romans. You may from these instances perceive the strength of the argument from prophecy; it has not been able indeed to vanquish the prejudices of either the ancient or the modern Porphry; but it has been able to compel them both to be guilty of obvious falsehoods, which have nothing but impudent assertions to support them. Some over zealous interpreters of Scripture have found prophecies in simple narrations, extended real predictions beyond the times and circumstances to which they naturally were applied, and perplexed their readers with a thousand quaint allusions and allegorical conceits; this proceeding has made men of sense pay less regard to prophecy in general. There are some predictions, however, such as those concerning the present state of the Jewish people, and the corruptions of Christianity, which are now fulfilling in the world; and which, if you will take the trouble to examine them, you will find of such an extraordinary nature, that you will not perhaps hesitate to refer them to God as their author; and if you once become persuaded of the truth of any one miracle, or of the completion of any one prophecy, you will resolve all your difficulties (concerning the manner of God's interposition in the moral government of our species, and the nature of the doctrines contained in revelation) into your own inability fully to comprehend the whole scheme of divine Providence.

We are told however, that the strangeness of the narration, and the difficulty of the doctrines contained in the New Testament, are not the only circumstances which induce you to reject it; you have discovered, you think, so many contradictions in the accounts which the Evangelists have given of the life of Christ, that you are compelled to consider the whole as an ill-digested and improbable story. You would not reason thus upon any other occasion; you would not reject as fabulous the accounts given by Livy and Polibius of Hannibal and the Carthaginians, though you should discover a difference betwixt them in several points of little importance. You cannot compare the history of the same events, as delivered by any two historians, but you will meet with many circumstances, which, though mentioned by one, are either wholly omitted, or differently related by the other; and this observation is peculiarly applicable to biographical writings: but no one ever thought of disbelieving the leading circumstances of the lives of Vitellius or Vespasian, because Tacitus and Suetonius did not in every thing correspond in their accounts of these emperors. And if the memoirs of the life and doctrines of M. de Voltaire himself were some twenty or thirty years after his death, to be delivered to the world by four of his most intimate acquaint-

tance, I do not apprehend that we should discredit the whole account of such an extraordinary man, by reason of some slight inconsistencies and contradictions, which the avowed enemies of his name might chance to discover in the several narrations. Though we should grant you, then that the evangelists had fallen into some trivial contradictions, in what they have related concerning the life of Christ; yet you ought not to draw any other inference from our concession than that they had not plotted together, as cheats would have done, in order to give an unexceptionable consistency to their fraud. We are not however disposed to make you any such concession; we will rather show you the futility of your general argument, by touching upon a few of the places which you think are most liable to your censure.

You observe, that neither Luke, nor Mark, nor John have mentioned the cruelty of Herod in murdering the infants of Bethlehem; and that no account is to be found of this matter in Josephus, who wrote the life of Herod; and therefore the fact recorded by Matthew is not true. The concurrent testimony of many independent writers concerning a matter of fact unquestionably adds to its probability; but if nothing is to be received as true, upon the testimony of a single author, we must give up some of the best writers, and disbelieve some of the most interesting facts of ancient history.

According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there was only an interval of three months, you say, between the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus; from which time, taking away the forty days of the temptation, there will only remain about six weeks for the whole period of his public ministry; which lasted, however, according to St. John, at the least above three years. Your objection fairly stated, stands thus: Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in writing the history of Jesus Christ, mention the several events of his life, as following one another in continued succession, without taking notice of the times in which they happened: but is it a just conclusion from their silence to infer, that there really were no intervals of time between the transactions which they seem to have connected? Many instances might be produced, from the most admired biographers of antiquity, in which events are related as immediately consequent to each other, which did not happen but at very distant periods: we have an obvious example of this manner of writing in St. Matthew; who connects the preaching of John the Baptist with the return of Joseph from from Egypt, though we are certain that the latter event preceded the former by a great many years.

John has said nothing of the institution of the Lord's supper; the other evangelists have said nothing of the washing of the disciples' feet. What then? are you not ashamed to produce these facts as instances of contradiction? If omissions are contradictions, look into the history of the age of Louis XIV., or into the general history of M. de Voltaire, and you will meet with a great abundance of contradictions.

John, in mentioning the discourses which Jesus had with his mother and his beloved disciple, at the time of his crucifixion, says, that she, with Mary Magdalene, stood near the cross. Matthew, on the other hand, says, that Mary Magdalene and the other women were there, beholding afar off. This you think a manifest contradiction; and scoffingly inquire, whether the women and the beloved disciple, which were near the cross, could be the same with those who stood far from the

cross? It is difficult not to transgress the bounds of moderation and good manners, in answering such sophistry. What! have you to learn that though the evangelists speak of the crucifixion as of one event, it was not accomplished in one instant, but lasted several hours? And why the women, who were at a distance from the cross, might not, during its continuance, draw near the cross; or, from being near the cross, might not move from the cross, is more than you can explain to either us or yourselves. And we take from you your only refuge, by denying expressly, that the different evangelists, in their mention of the women, speak of the same point of time.

The evangelists, you affirm, are fallen into gross contradictions, in their accounts of the appearances by which Jesus manifested himself to to his disciples, after his resurrection from the dead; for Matthew speaks of two, Mark of three, Luke of two, and John of four. That contradictory propositions cannot be true is readily granted; and if you will produce the place in which Matthew says that Jesus Christ appeared twice, and *no oftener*, it will be further granted, that he is contradicted by John in a very material part of his narration; but till you do that, you must excuse me, if I cannot grant, that the evangelists have contradicted each other in this point; for to common understandings it is pretty evident, that if Christ appeared four times according to John's account, he must have appeared twice according to that of Matthew and Luke and thrice according to that of Mark.

The different evangelists are not only accused of contradicting each other, but Luke is said to have contradicted himself; for in his Gospel he tells us, that Jesus ascended into heaven from Bethany; and in the Acts of the Apostles, of which he is the reputed author, he informs us that he ascended from Mount Olivet. Your objection proceeds either from your ignorance of geography, or your ill-will to Christianity; and upon either supposition deserves our contempt: be pleased, however, to remember for the future, that Bethany was not only the name of a town, but of a district of Mount Olivet adjoining to the town.

From this specimen of the contradictions ascribed to the historians of the life of Christ, you may judge for yourselves what little reason there is to reject Christianity upon their account; and how sadly you will be imposed upon (in a matter of more consequence to you than any other) if you take every thing for a contradiction, which the uncandid adversaries of Christianity think proper to call one.

Before I put an end to this address, I cannot help taking notice of an argument, by which some philosophers have of late endeavored to overturn the whole system of revelation: and it is the more necessary to give an answer to their objection, as it is become a common subject of philosophical conversation, especially amongst those who have visited the continent. The objection tends to invalidate, as is supposed, the authority of Moses, by showing, that the earth is much older than it can be proved to be from his account of the creation, and the Scripture chronology. We contend, that six thousand years have not yet elapsed since the creation; and these philosophers contend, that they have indubitable proof of the earth's being at the least fourteen thousand years old; and they complain that Moses hangs as a dead weight upon them, and blunts all their zeal for inquiry.*

* Brydone's Travels.

The Canonico Recupero, who, it seems, is engaged in writing the history of Mount Etna, has discovered a stratum of lava, which flowed from that mountain, according to his opinion, in the time of the second Punic war, or about two thousand years ago; this stratum is not yet covered with soil sufficient for the production of either corn or vines; it requires then, says the Canon, two thousand years at least to convert a stratum of lava into a fertile field. In sinking a pit near Jaci, in the neighborhood of Etna, they have discovered evident marks of seven distinct lavas, one under the other; the surfaces of which are parallel, and most of them covered with a thick bed of rich earth; now, the eruption which formed the lowest part of these lavas (if we may be allowed to reason, says the Canon, from analogy) flowed from the mountain at least fourteen thousand years ago. It might be briefly answered to this objection, by denying, that there is any thing in the history of Moses repugnant to this opinion concerning the great antiquity of the earth; for though the rise and progress of arts and sciences, and the small multiplication of the human species, render it almost to a demonstration probable that man has not existed longer upon the surface of this earth than according to the Mosaic account; yet that the earth itself was then created out of nothing, when man was placed upon it, is not, according to the sentiments of some philosophers, to be proved from the original text of sacred Scripture; we might, I say, reply with these philosophers to this formidable objection of the Canon, by granting it in its fullest extent; we are under no necessity, however, of adopting their opinion, in order to show the weakness of the Canon's reasoning. For, in the first place, the Canon has not satisfactorily established his main fact, that the lava in question is the identical lava which Diodorus Siculus mentions to have flowed from Etna, in the second Carthaginian war; and, in the second place, it may be observed, that the time necessary for converting lava into fertile fields must be very different, according to the different consistencies of the lavas, and their different situations, with respect to elevation or depression; to their being exposed to winds, rains, and to other circumstances: just as the time in which the heaps of iron slag (which resembles lava) are covered with verdure, is different at different furnaces, according to the nature of the slag, and situation of the furnace; and something of this kind is deducible from the account of the Canon himself: since the crevices of this famous stratum are really full of rich, good soil, and have pretty large trees growing in them.

But if all this should be thought not sufficient to remove the objection, I will produce the Canon an analogy in opposition to his analogy, and which is founded on more certain facts. Etna and Vesuvius resemble each other, in the causes which produce their eruptions, and in the nature of their lavas, and in the time necessary to mellow them into soil fit for vegetation; or if there be any slight difference in this respect, it is probably not greater than what subsists between different lavas of the same mountain. This being admitted, which no philosopher will deny, the Canon's analogy will prove just nothing at all, if we can produce an instance of seven different lavas (with interjacent strata of vegetable earth,) which have flowed from Mount Vesuvius, within the space, not of fourteen thousand, but of somewhat less than seventeen hundred years; for then, according to our analogy, a stratum of lava may be covered with vegetable soil in about two hundred and fifty years, instead of re-

quiring two thousand for the purpose. The eruption of Vesuvius, which destroyed Herculaneum and Pompeii, is rendered still more famous by the death of Pliny, recorded by his nephew in his letter to Tacitus; this event happened in the year 79; it is not then quite seventeen hundred years since Herculaneum was swallowed up; but we are informed by unquestionable authority, that "the matter which covers the ancient town of Herculaneum is not the produce of one eruption only; for there are evident marks, that the matter of six eruptions has taken its course over that which lies immediately above the town, and was the cause of its destruction. These strata are either of lava or burnt matter, *with veins of good soil betwixt them.*"* I will not add another word upon this subject; except that the bishop of the diocese was not much out in his advice to Canonica Recupero; to take care not to make his mountain older than Moses; though it would have been full as well to have shut his mouth with a reason, as to have stopped it with the dread of an ecclesiastical censure.

You perceive with what ease a little attention will remove a great difficulty; but had we been able to say nothing in explanation of this phenomenon, we should not have acted a very rational part in making our ignorance the foundation of our infidelity, or suffering a minute philosopher to rob us of our religion.

Your objections to revelation may be numerous; you may find fault with the account which Moses has given of the creation and the fall; you may not be able to get water enough for a universal deluge; nor room enough in the ark of Noah for all the different kinds of aerial and terrestrial animals; you may be dissatisfied with the command for sacrificing of Isaac, for plundering the Egyptians, and for extirpating the Canaanites; you may find fault with the Jewish economy, for its ceremonies, its sacrifices, and its multiplicity of priests; you may object to the imprecations in the Psalms, and think the immoralities of David a fit subject for dramatic ridicule;† you may look upon the partial promulgation of Christianity as an insuperable objection to its truth, and waywardly reject the goodness of God toward yourselves, because you do not comprehend how you have deserved it more than others; you may know nothing of the entrance of sin and death into the world by one man's transgression; nor be able to comprehend the doctrine of the cross, and of redemption by Jesus Christ: in short if your mind is so disposed, you may find food for your scepticism in every page of the Bible, as well as in every appearance of nature; and it is not in the power of any person, but yourselves, to clear up your doubts; you must read, and you must think for yourselves; and you must do both with temper, with candor, and with care. Infidelity is a rank weed; it is nurtured by our vices, and cannot be plucked up as easily as it may be planted. Your difficulties with respect to revelation may have first arisen from your own reflection on the religious indifference of those, whom, from your earliest infancy, you have been accustomed to revere and imitate: domestic irreligion may have made you a willing hearer of

* See Sir William Hamilton's Remarks upon the Nature of the Soil of Naples and its Neighborhood, in the Philos. Trans. vol. lxi. p. 7.

† See Saul et David Hyperdrame. Whatever censure the author of this composition may deserve for his intention, the work itself deserves none; its ridicule is too gross to mislead even the ignorant.

libertine conversation ; and the uniform prejudices of the world may have finished the business, at a very early age, and left you to wander through life, without a principle to direct your conduct, and to die with out hope. We are far from wishing you to trust the word of the clergy for the truth of your religion ; we beg of you to examine it to the bottom, to try it, to prove it, and not to hold it fast unless you find it good. Till you are disposed to undertake this task, it becomes you to consider with great seriousness and attention, whether it can be for your interest to esteem a few witty sarcasms, or metaphysic subtleties or, ignorant misrepresentations, or unwarranted assertions, as unanswerable arguments against revelation ; and a very slight reflection will convince you, that it will certainly be for your reputation to employ the flippancy of your rhetoric, and the poignancy of your ridicule, upon any subject rather than upon the subject of religion.

I take my leave with recommending to your notice the advice which Mr. Locke gave to a young man, who was desirous of becoming acquainted with the doctrines of the Christian religion :—"Study the holy Scripture, especially the New Testament : therein are contained the words of eternal life. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter."* I am, &c.

* Locke's Posthumous Works.

CONVERSATION

HELD WITH A

YOUNG TRAVELER,

BY REV. DR. JOHN MASON,

FIRST PASTOR OF THE SCOTCH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK.

EVERY one has remarked the mixed, and often ill-assorted company which meets in a public packet or stage-coach. The conversation, with all its variety, is commonly insipid, frequently disgusting, and sometimes insufferable. There are exceptions. An opportunity now and then occurs of spending an hour in a manner not unworthy of rational beings; and the incidents of a stage coach produce or promote salutary impressions.

A few years ago, one of the stages which ply between our two principal cities, was filled with a group which could never have been drawn together by mutual choice. In the company was a young man of social temper, affable manners, and considerable information. His accent was barely sufficient to show that the English was not his native tongue, and a very slight peculiarity in the pronunciation of the *th* ascertained him to be a Hollander. He had early entered into military life; had borne both a Dutch and a French commission; had seen real service, had traveled, was master of the English language; and evinced, by his deportment, that he was no stranger to the society of gentlemen. He had however, in a very high degree, a fault too common among military men, and too absurd to find an advocate among men of sense—He swore profanely and incessantly.

While the horses were changing, a gentleman who sat on the same seat with him took him by the arm, and requested the favor of his company in a short walk. When they were so far retired as not to be overheard, the former observed, "Although I have not the honor of your acquaintance, I perceive, sir, that your habits and feelings, are those of a gentleman, and that nothing can be more repugnant to your wishes than giving unnecessary pain to any of your company." He started, and replied, "Most certainly, Sir! I hope I have committed no offence of that sort."

"You will pardon me," replied the other, "for pointing out an instance in which you have not altogether avoided it."

"Sir," said he, "I shall be much your debtor for so friendly an act: for, upon my honor, I cannot conjecture in what I have transgressed."

"If you, sir," continued the former, "had a very dear friend to

whom you were under unspeakable obligations, should you not be deeply wounded by any disrespect to him, or even by hearing his name introduced and used with a frequency of repetition and a levity of air incompatible with the regard due to his character?"

"Undoubtedly, and I should not permit it! but I know not that I am chargeable with indecorum to any of your friends."

"Sir, my God is my best friend, to whom I am under infinite obligations. I think you must recollect that you have very frequently, since we commenced our journey, taken his name in vain. *This* has given to me and to others of the company excruciating pain."

"Sir," answered he, with very ingenious emphasis, "*I have* done wrong. I confess the impropriety. I am ashamed of a practice which I am sensible has no excuse: but I have imperceptibly fallen into it, and I really swear without being conscious that I do so. I will endeavor to abstain from it in future; and as you are next me on the seat, I shall thank you to touch my elbow as often as I trespass." This was agreed upon: the horn sounded, and the travelers resumed their places.

In the space of four or five miles the officer's elbow was joggled every few seconds. He always colored, but bowed, and received the hint without the least symptom of displeasure: and in a few miles more so mastered his propensity to swearing, that not an oath was heard from his lips for the rest, which was the greater part of the journey.

He was evidently more grave; and having ruminated some time, after surveying first one and then another of the company, turned to his admonisher, and addressed him thus:

"You are a clergyman, I presume, Sir."

"I am considered as such." He paused: and then, with a smile, indicated his disbelief in divine revelation, in a way which invited conversation on that subject.

"I have never been able to convince myself of the truth of revelation."

"Possibly not. But what is your difficulty?"

"I dislike the nature of its proofs. They are so subtle, so distant; so wrapt in mystery; so metaphysical, that I get lost, and can arrive at no certain conclusion."

"I cannot admit the fact to be as you represent it. My impressions are altogether different. Nothing seems to me more plain and popular; more level to every common understanding; more remote from all cloudy speculation, or teasing subtleties, than some of the principal proofs of divine revelation. They are drawn from great and incontestible facts; they are accumulating every hour: they have grown into such a mass of evidence, that the supposition of its falsehood is infinitely more incredible than any one mystery in the volumes of revelation, or even than all their mysteries put together. Your inquiries, sir, appear to have been unhappily directed—But what *sort* of proof do you desire, and what would satisfy you?"

"Such proofs as accompany physical science. This I have always loved; for I never find it deceive me. I rest upon it with entire conviction. There is no mistake, and can be no dispute in mathematics. And if a revelation comes from God, why have we not such evidence for it as mathematical demonstration?"

"Sir, you are too good a philosopher not to know, that the nature of evidence must be adapted to the nature of its object; that if you break in upon this adaptation, you will have no evidence at all; seeing that evidence is no more interchangeable than objects. If you ask for mathematical evidence, you must confine yourself to mathematical disquisitions. Your subject must be *quantity*. If you wish to pursue a moral investigation, you must quit your mathematics, and confine yourself to moral evidence. Your subject must be the *relations which subsist between intelligent beings*. It would be quite as wise to apply a rule in ethics to the calculation of an eclipse, as to call for Euclid when we want to know our duty, or to submit the question, "whether God has spoken," to the test of a problem in the conic sections. How would you prove mathematically, that bread nourishes men, and that fevers kill them? Yet you and I both are as firmly convinced of the truth of these propositions, as of any mathematical demonstration whatever: and should I call them in question, my neighbors would either pity me as an idiot, or shut me up as a madman. It is, therefore, a great mistake to suppose, that there is no satisfactory nor certain evidence but what is reducible to mathematics."

This train of reflection appeared new to him. For, however obvious it is, we must remember that nothing is more superficial than freethinking philosophy, and nothing more credulous than its unbelief. Dogmatical positions asserted with confidence, set off with small ridicule, and favorable to native depravity, have a prodigious effect upon the volatile youth; and persuade him that they have enlightened his understanding, when they have only flattered his vanity, or corrupted his heart.

The officer, though staggered, made an effort to maintain his ground, and lamented that the "objections to other modes of reasoning are numerous and perplexing, while the mathematical conclusion puts all scepticism at defiance."

"Sir," rejoined the clergyman, "objections against a thing fairly proved, are of no weight. The proof rests upon our knowledge, and the objections upon our ignorance. It is true, that moral demonstrations and religious doctrines may be attacked in a very ingenious and plausible manner, because they involve questions on which our ignorance is greater than our knowledge: but still our knowledge is knowledge; or, in other words, our certainty is certainty. In mathematical reasoning our knowledge is greater than our ignorance. When you have proved that *the three angles of every triangle are equal to two right angles*, there is an end of doubt; because there are no materials for ignorance to work up into phantoms; but your knowledge is really no more certain than your knowledge on any other subject.

"There is also a deception in this matter. The defect complained of is supposed to exist in the *nature of the proof*; whereas it exists, for the most part, in the *mind of the inquirer*. It is impossible to tell how far the influence of human depravity obscures the light of human reason."

At the mention of "depravity," the officer smiled, and seemed inclined to jest; probably suspecting, as is common with men of that class, that his antagonist was going to retreat into his creed, and intrench himself behind a technical term, instead of an argument. The triumph was premature.

"You do not imagine, Sir," said he, continuing his discourse to the officer, "you do not imagine that a man who has been long addicted to stealing feels the force of reasoning against theft as strongly as a man of tried honesty. If you hesitate, proceed a step further. You do not imagine that an habitual thief feels as much abhorrence of his own trade and character, as a man who never committed an act of theft in his whole life. And you will not deny that the practice of *any* crime gradually weakens, and frequently destroys, the sense of its turpitude. This is a strong *fact*, which, as a philosopher, you are bound to explain. To me it is clear as the day, that his vice has debauched his intellect: for it is indisputable, that the considerations which *once* filled him with horror, produce *now* no more impression upon him than they would produce upon a horse, Why? Has the vice changed? Have the considerations changed? No. The vice is as pernicious, and the considerations are as strong, as ever. But his power of perceiving truth is diminished; and diminished by his vice; for had he not fallen into it, the considerations would have retained, and should he be saved from it, they will resume their original force upon his mind. Permit yourself, for one moment, to reflect how hard it is to persuade men of the virtues of others against whom they are prejudiced! You shall bring no proof of the virtues which the prejudice shall not resist or evade. Remove the prejudice, and the proof appears invincible. Why? Have the virtues changed? Has the proof been strengthened? No. But the power of perceiving truth is increased: or, which is the same thing, the impediment to perceiving it, is taken away. If, then, there are bad passions among men; and if the object of divine revelation is to control and rectify them; it follows, that a man to whom the revelation is proposed, will be blind to its evidence in exact proportion to the perverting influence of those passions. And were the human mind free from corruption, there is no reason whatever to think that a moral argument would not be as conclusive as a mathematical argument is now; and that the principles of moral and religious science would not command an assent as instantaneous and peremptory as that which is commanded by mathematical axioms."

After a short pause, in which no reply was made by the officer, and the looks of the company revealed their sentiments, the clergymann proceeded:

"But what will you say, Sir, should I endeavor to turn the tables upon you, by showing that the evidence of your physical science is not without its difficulties; and that objections can be urged against mathematical demonstration more puzzling and unanswerable than any objections against moral evidence?"

"I shall yield the cause; but I am sure that the condition is impossible."

"Let us try," said the other.

"I begin with a common case. The Newtonian system of the world is so perfectly settled, that no scholar presumes to question it. Go then, to a peasant who never heard of Newton, nor Copernicus, nor the solar system; and tell him that the earth moves round its axis, and round the sun. He will stare at you, to see whether you be not jeering him; and when he sees you are in earnest, he will laugh at you for a fool. Ply him, now, with your mathematical and astronomical reasoning. He will

answer you that he believes his own eye-sight more than your learning; and his eye-sight tells him the sun moves round the earth. And as for the earth's turning round upon her axis, he will say, that "he has often hung a kettle over the fire at night: and when he came back in the morning, it was hanging there still; but had the earth turned round, the kettle would have been turned over and the mash spilled over the floor." You are amused with the peasant's simplicity, but you cannot convince him. His objection is, in his own eyes, insurmountable; he will tell the affair to his neighbors as a good story; and they will agree that he fairly shut the philosopher's mouth. You may reply, that "the peasant was introduced into the middle of a matured science, and that not having learned its elements, he was unsupplied with the principles of correct judgment." True: but your solution has overthrown yourself. A free-thinker, when he hears some great doctrine of Christianity, lets off a small objection, and runs away laughing at the folly, or railing at the imposture, of all who venture to defend a divine revelation; he gathers his brother unbelievers, and they unite with him in wondering at the weakness or the impudence of Christians. He is in the very situation of the peasant. He bolts into the heart of a grand religious system; he has never adverted to its first principles, and then he complains that the evidence is bad. But the fault, in neither case, lies in the evidence. It lies in the ignorance or obstinacy of the objector. The peasant's ground is as firm as the infidel's. The proof of the Newtonian system is to the former as distant, subtle, and cloudy, as the proof of revelation can be to the latter: and the objection of the one as good as the objection of the other. If the depravity of men had as much interest in persuading them that the earth is not globular, and does not move round the sun, as it has in persuading them that the Bible is not true, a mathematical demonstration would fail of converting them, although the demonstrator were an angel of God!

"But with respect to the second point, *viz.* that there are objections to mathematical evidence more puzzling and unanswerable than can be alleged against moral reasoning, take the two following instances:

"It is mathematically demonstrated that matter is *infinitely divisible*: that is, has an *infinite number of parts*: a line, then, of half an inch long has an infinite number of parts. Who does not see the absurdity of an *infinite half-inch*? Try the difficulty another way. It requires *some* portion of time to pass a particle of matter. Then as your half-inch has an infinite number of parts, it requires an infinite number of portions of time for a moving point to pass by the infinite number of parts; but an infinite number of portions of time is an eternity! Consequently it requires an eternity, or something like it, to move *half an inch*."

"But, Sir," interposed the officer, "you do not deny the accuracy of the demonstration, that matter is infinitely divisible!" "Not in the least, sir; I perceive no flaw in the change of demonstration, and yet I perceive the result to be infinitely absurd."

"Again: it is mathematically demonstrated, that a straight line, called the *asymptote* of the hyperbola, may *eternally approach* the curve of the hyperbola, and yet can never *meet it*. Now, as all demonstrations are built upon axioms, an axiom must always be plainer than a demonstration; and to my judgment it is as plain, that if two lines continually

approach, they shall meet, as that the whole is greater than its part. Here, therefore, I am fixed. I have a demonstration directly in the teeth of an axiom, and am equally incapable of denying either side of the contradiction."

"Sir," exclaimed the officer, clapping his hands together, "I own I am beat, completely beat: I have nothing more to say."

A silence of some minutes succeeded; when the young military traveler said to his theological friend, "I have studied *all* religions, and have not been able to satisfy myself."

"No, sir," answered he, "there is *one* religion which you have not yet studied."

"Pray, sir," cried the officer, roused and eager, "what is *that*?"

"The religion," replied the other, "of salvation through the redemption of the Son of God: the religion which will sweeten your pleasures, and soften your sorrows; which will give peace to your conscience, and joy to your heart: which will bear you up under the pressure of evils here, and shed the light of immortality on the gloom of the grave. *This* religion, I believe, Sir, you have yet to study."

The officer put his hands upon his face; then languidly clasping them, let them fall down: forced a smile, and said with a sigh, "We must all follow what we think best." His behavior afterwards was perfectly decorous. Nothing further is known of him.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST AN EVIDENCE OF HIS DIVINITY. BY J. BURGH.

THERE is indeed no argument for the truth of Christianity more irresistible than the character and conduct of its first propagators, and especially of its glorious Author. No human sagacity could, from mere invention, have put together a fictitious account of the behavior, of a person, in so many strange and uncommon particulars, as the evangelists have told us of our Saviour, without their swelling up the imaginary character into that of the hero of a romance, or drawing it defaced with faults and blemishes. That human invention is by no means equal to any such task, is evident from the success of the attempts which have been made by the greatest masters of description to draw perfect characters, especially where any thing supernatural was to have a place. And that such a character, as that of our Saviour, should be drawn so

uniform and consistent, at the same time that it is so wholly new and peculiar, that in all the histories, and all the epic poems, in the world, there is no pattern, from whence the least hint could be taken, to form it by; that this character, in which the greatness is of so extraordinary and stupendous a kind, that whatever is great in those of warriors, or heroes, or kings, is despised and neglected by him, and infinitely beneath him, that such a character should be the invention of a few illiterate men; and that it should by them be exhibited, not by studied encomiums, but by a bare unadorned narration of facts, but such facts as are no where else to be equalled; he who can believe that all this could be the effect of mere human invention, without superior interposition, must be capable of believing any thing. So that I may defy all the opposers of revelation to answer this question, how we came to have such a character, as that of *Christ*, drawn as it is, and drawn by such authors, if it was not taken from a real original, and if that original was not something above human?

I do not think it would be a hard matter to write a volume upon this subject, without treading much in the footsteps of those who have written upon the life of *Christ*. But without considering at present, what has, or has not, been said by others, I shall only desire the reader to peruse carefully the evangelical history (with what helps may be necessary;) attending, as he goes through the account of the words and actions of our Saviour, to the disposition, genius, or spirit, which shines throughout the whole. Let him consider the tender compassion and love for a race of perverse, self-destroyed creatures, which must have prompted this glorious Being to condescend thus low to instruct and save them from vice and its direful consequences. At the same time, let the wisdom he showed in doing so, be considered; since nothing conceivable is of greater importance, or more worthy of a being of the highest dignity, than the recovery of a species, otherwise lost and undone, to virtue and endless happiness. Let the prudence and judgment of this Divine instructor be attentively considered. How easy had it been for him, in whom were hid all the treasures of wisdom, to have given forth his instructions in such a manner as to have overpowered all human understanding? How hard do we see it is for men of superior learning to adapt their lessons to the capacities of the young and ignorant? How irksome to most men the employment of teaching? How few teachers are there, who can avoid showing some affectation of their superiority in knowledge? Who could have expected, that ever he, who was the instrument of God in making this world, whose Divine penetration saw by intuition through all the depths of science, which a *Newton* could only collect by laborious enquiry, by accurate calculation, and distant analogy; that one, capable of instructing the most enlightened archangel, should condescend to initiate in first principles, a multitude of ignorant, illiterate mortals. "Blessed are the humble, the meek, the merciful." Here is no affectation of mystic learning; no pompous ostentation of profound science, no nice distinction of speculative points. And yet, when all is duly considered, it was no more derogation from the dignity of a Teacher capable of instructing angels, to condescend to give to those, who may hereafter come to be companions of angels, the first principles of virtue, which is the only true wisdom, than for a philosopher to teach his son the first rudiments of learning. Then how

wisely does he suit his instructions both to the capacities and dispositions of his hearers ! Parable and allegory have ever been thought the he most entertaining manner of communicating instruction. The severity of the precept is lost in the entertainment of the fable. The sensible image reflects a light upon the moral thought ; and the abstract thought gives an importance to the sensible representation. By apt similitude therefore, and allegories drawn from the surrounding objects, did this great Teacher recommend to his hearers the most solemn truths and important precepts. The honest and teachable mind was thus allured to search after divine knowledge ; while the proud and obstinate scorned the trouble of enquiring into the easy meaning of the figures used by him. Thus did his instructions become what all addresses to free and reasoning beings ought, a part of trial and discipline. So that they who were well disposed might receive improvement and advantage, and the hard-hearted might hear and not understand.

With what graceful ease, and yet solemn composure, does he accommodate himself to the conversation of all sorts of persons ! Among the wise and learned, how does he shine in communicating clear and important truth, confuting their artificial sophisms, and silencing their malicious cavils ! Among the illiterate, how does he condescend to the meanness of their understandings, and adapt his instructions to their apprehension, and useful train of thinking, raising his reflections from the present objects, and improving upon the most common occasions ! Even women and children are taken notice of by this wisest of teachers. And with reason. For no well disposed human mind is of little consequence. Whatever it is at present, it is in the way to be hereafter great and glorious. The character, in short, which the Saviour of the world assumed, seems to have been equally sublime and amiable.

How does his wisdom, and the dignity of his character, appear in his discouraging all idle curiosity, which engages the mind unprofitably, and takes off its attention from the awful business for which we were sent into the world ; at the same time, that he fails not to answer any useful question that is put to him ; and ever turns the attention to something great, and worthy of a Divine instructor to dwell upon !

How different his manner of communicating instruction, from the dictates of the artful impostor or wild enthusiast ! instead of threatening with fire and sword the opposers of divine truth, he kindly forwarns them of the natural and judicial effects of their impious obstinacy and malice. Instead of thundering out spiritual anathemas or excommunications against those who would not take his religion on trust ; instead of depriving them of the temporal advantage, to which every peaceable subject has an unquestionable right ; instead of employing the secular arm to decide in matters of conscience where civil power has no right to interpose ; instead of setting the world in a flame about mere speculative opinions, and doubtful doctrines, this Divine teacher applies himself to mankind, as one who understood mankind. He addresses himself to their reason. He calls upon them to exert their understanding. He does not insist upon their believing him on his own assertion, though he might have done so, on a much better pretence, than the purest church, the most numerous council, or the infallible bishop of *Rome* himself. He claims no implicit authority over their faith ; but appeals to the works, which they saw him perform, and

to the prophecies of their own Scriptures, which they saw fulfilled in him. The doctrines he dwells upon, and labors to inculcate, are the great and important points of morality, the duties of love to God, and benevolence to man; the heavenly virtues of sincerity, self-denial, contempt of a vain world, humility, meekness, and the other excellent graces, which make the only true ornament of the human mind, which have a natural tendency to qualify it for the society of all well-disposed beings in the universe. Is not this the very doctrine, are not these the very precepts, which one would expect the messenger of God to mankind to teach and inculcate? The perverse, or vicious opposer of religion may cavil as long as he will; but I think myself safe in venturing the cause I defend, upon the sense of every well-disposed mind; to which I dare appeal, whether it does not *feel* the Divine authority of this heavenly Teacher, in the excellence of his doctrines and precepts? But to proceed:

How patiently does he bear with the mean and groveling ideas his disciples had at first of the character in which the *Messiah* ought to appear! How kindly does he overlook their weakness, in fixing all their desires on worldly grandeur! What pity does he show for the unhappy uninstructed part of the people, the publicans and sinners! How does he show himself ready to pardon, though by no means ready to justify, the offences, which proceed from the unthinking indulgence of passion and appetite, while he denounces woes upon the hardened and hypocritical sinner? Wonderful! that he, who himself knew no fault, should thus bear with the faults of wretched mortals; while they, though all guilty before God, find it so hard to bear with one another.

Let the noble and heroic behavior of the Prince of Peace, toward his wicked and implacable enemies, be considered. How does he show himself above their utmost malice? Does he not go on still in his calm dignity, and equal goodness, in spite of their utmost fury, till he has finished his ministry, and the time comes for him to return to the state of happiness, and glory he had left. When their hour and the power of darkness prevails, with what meekness does he give himself up into their cruel hands? When they come to apprehend him, and, struck with the majesty which surrounded him, fly back and fall before him to the ground, he exerts no vindictive power against them, though he could with a word have struck them so as they should have risen no more, and could have called legions of angels, who would have thought it their honour to have been commanded to interpose for his deliverance. But though he wrought a miracle to avoid regal power, he works none to escape an infamous death.

☞ We conclude this number with two short articles, it being our desire to commence and give entire in our next a very important publication.

200.7
HISTORIC,

D O U B T S

RELATIVE TO

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

Whately

"Is not the same reason available in theology and in politics?
Will you follow truth but to a certain point?"

Vindication of Natural Society by a late noble writer.

FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE FIFTH LONDON EDITION.

New-York:

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY FOR THE DIFFUSION
OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

1835.



P R E F A C E.

SEVERAL of the readers of this little work have derived much amusement from the mistakes of others respecting its nature and object. It has been by some represented as a serious attempt to inculcate universal scepticism; while others have considered it a *jeu d'esprit*, &c. The author does not however design to entertain his readers with accounts of the mistakes which have arisen respecting it; because many of them, he is convinced, would be received with incredulity; and he could not, without an indelicate exposure of individuals, verify his anecdotes.

But some sensible readers have complained of the difficulty of determining *what* they are to believe. Of the existence of Bonaparte, indeed, they are fully convinced; nor, if it were left doubtful, would any important results ensue; but if they can give no *satisfactory reason* for their conviction, how can they know, it is asked, that they may not be mistaken as to other points of greater consequence, on which they are no less fully convinced, but on which all men are not agreed? The author has accordingly been solicited to endeavor to frame some canons which may furnish a standard for determining what evidence is to be received. This he conceives to be impracticable, except to that extent to which it is accomplished by a sound system of logic. The full accomplishment of it, indeed, would confer on man the unattainable attribute of infallibility.

But the difficulty complained of he conceives to arise from their *mistaking the grounds of their own conviction*. They are convinced, indeed, and perhaps with very sufficient reason; but they imagine this reason to be a different one from what it is. The evidence to which they have assented is applied to their minds in a different manner from that in which they believe it is, and suppose it ought to be applied. And when challenged to defend and justify their own belief, they feel at a loss, because they are attempting to maintain a position which is not in fact that in which their force lies.

For a development of the nature, the consequences, and the reme-

dies of this mistake, the reader is referred to "Hinds on Inspiration," p. 30—46. If such a development is to be found in other books, the author of the following pages at least has never chanced to meet with any attempt of the kind.

It is only necessary to add, that as this work first appeared in the year 1819, many things are spoken of in the present tense to which the past would now be applicable.

The Postscript was added to the third edition, which was published soon after the accounts of Bonaparte's death reached us.

HISTORIC DOUBTS

RELATIVE TO

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

LONG as the public attention has been occupied by the extraordinary personage from whose ambition we are supposed to have so narrowly escaped, the subject seems to have lost scarcely any thing of its interest. We are still occupied in recounting the exploits, discussing the character, inquiring into the present situation, and even conjecturing as to the future prospects of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Nor is this at all to be wondered at, if we consider the very extraordinary nature of those exploits, and of that character; their greatness and extensive importance, as well as the unexampled strangeness of the events, and also, that strong additional stimulant, the mysterious uncertainty that hangs over the character of the man. If it be doubtful whether any history (exclusive of such as is avowedly fabulous) ever attributed to its hero such a series of wonderful achievements compressed into so small a space of time, it is certain that to no one were ever assigned so many dissimilar characters.

It is true indeed that party prejudices have drawn a favorable and an unfavorable portrait, of almost every eminent man; but amidst all the diversities of coloring, something of the same general outline is always distinguishable. And even the virtues in the one description, bear some resemblance to the vices of another; rashness, for instance, will be called courage, or courage, rashness; heroic firmness, and obstinate pride, will correspond in the two opposite descriptions; and in some leading features, both will agree. Neither the friends nor the enemies, of Philip of Macedon, or of Julius Cæsar, ever questioned their courage or their military skill.

With Bonaparte however it has been otherwise. This obscure Corsican adventurer, a man, according to some, of extraordinary talents and courage, according to others, of very moderate abilities, and a rank coward, advanced rapidly in the French army, obtained a high command, gained a series of important victories, and, elated by success, embarked in an expedition against Egypt; which was planned and conducted, according to some, with the most consummate skill, according to others, with the utmost wildness and folly: he was unsuccessful however; and leaving the army of Egypt in a very distressed situation, he returned to France, and found the nation, or at least the army, so favorably disposed towards him, that he was enabled, with the utmost ease, to overthrow the existing government, and obtain for himself the supreme power; at first under the modest appellation of Consul, but afterwards with the more sounding title of Emperor. While in possession of this power, he

overthrew the most powerful coalitions of the other European States against him ; and though driven from the sea by the British fleets, overran nearly the whole continent, triumphant : finishing a war, not unfrequently in a single campaign, he entered the capitals of most of the hostile potentates, deposed and created kings at his pleasure, and appeared the virtual sovereign of the chief part of the continent, from the frontiers of Spain to those of Russia. Even those countries we find him invading with prodigious armies, defeating their forces, penetrating to their capitals, and threatening their total subjugation. But at Moscow his progress is stopped : a winter of unusual severity, co-operating with the efforts of the Russians, totally destroys his enormous host ; and the German sovereigns throw off the yoke, and combine to oppose him. He raises another vast army, which is also ruined at Leipsic : and again another, with which, like a second Antæus, he for some time maintains himself in France ; but is finally defeated, deposed, and banished to the island of Elba, of which the sovereignty is conferred on him. Thence he returns, in about nine months, at the head of 600 men, to attempt the deposition of King Louis, who had been peaceably recalled ; the French nation declare in his favor, and he is reinstated without a struggle. He raises another great army to oppose the allied powers, which is totally defeated at Waterloo : he is a second time deposed, surrenders to the British, and is placed in confinement at the island of St. Helena. Such is the outline of the eventful history presented to us ; in the detail of which, however, there is almost every conceivable variety of statement ; while the motives and conduct of the chief actor are involved in still greater doubt, and the subject of still more eager controversy.

In the midst of these controversies, the preliminary question, concerning the *existence* of this extraordinary personage, seems never to have occurred to any one as a matter of doubt ; and to show even the smallest hesitation in admitting it, would probably be regarded as an excess of scepticism ; on the ground that this point has always been taken for granted by the disputants on all sides, being indeed implied by the very nature of their disputes.

But is it in fact found that *undisputed* points are always such as have been the most carefully examined as to the evidence on which they rest ? that facts or principles which are taken for granted, without controversy, as the common basis of opposite opinions, are always themselves established on sufficient grounds ? On the contrary, is not any such fundamental point, from the very circumstance of its being taken for granted at once, and the attention drawn off to some other question, likely to be admitted on insufficient evidence, and the flaws in that evidence overlooked ? Experience will teach us that such instances often occur : witness the well-known anecdote of the Royal Society ; to whom King Charles II. proposed as a question, whence it is that a vessel of water receives no addition of weight from a live fish being put into it, though it does, if the fish be dead. Various solutions of great ingenuity were proposed, discussed, objected to, and defended ; nor was it till they had been long bewildered in the inquiry, that it occurred to them to *try the experiment* ; by which they at once ascertained, that the phenomenon which they were striving to account for,—which was the acknowledged basis, and substratum, as it were, of their debates,—had no existence but in the invention of the witty monarch.

Another instance of the same kind is so very remarkable that I can-

not forbear mentioning it. It was objected to the system of Copernicus when first brought forward, that if the earth turned on its axis as he represented, a stone dropped from the summit of a tower would not fall at the foot of it, but at a great distance to the west; *in the same manner as a stone dropped from the mast-head of a ship in full sail, does not fall at the foot of the mast, but towards the stern.* To this it was answered, that a stone being a *part* of the earth obeys the same laws, and moves with it, whereas it is no part of the ship; of which consequently its motion is independent. This solution was admitted by some, but opposed by others; and the controversy went on with spirit; nor was it till *one hundred years* after the death of Copernicus, that, the experiment being tried, it was ascertained that the stone thus dropped from the head of the mast, *does* fall at the foot of it!*

Let it be observed that I am not now impugning any one particular point; but merely showing generally, that what is *unquestioned* is not necessarily unquestionable; since men will often, at the very moment when they are accurately sifting the evidence of some disputed point, admit hastily, and on the most insufficient grounds, what they have been accustomed to see taken for granted.

The celebrated Hume† has pointed out also the readiness with which men believe, on very slight evidence, any story that pleases their imagination by its admirable and marvellous character. Such hasty credulity, however, as he well remarks, is utterly unworthy of a philosophical mind; which should rather suspend its judgment the more, in proportion to the strangeness of the account; and yield to none but the most decisive and unimpeachable proofs.

Let it then be allowed us, as is surely reasonable, just to inquire, with respect to the extraordinary story I have been speaking of, on what evidence we believe it. We shall be told that it is *notorious*; i. e. in plain English, it is very much talked about. But as the generality of those who talk about Bonaparte do not even pretend to speak from *their own authority*, but merely to repeat what they have casually heard, we cannot reckon them as in any degree witnesses; but must allow ninety-nine hundredths of what we are told, to be mere hear-say, which would not be at all the more worthy of credit even if it were repeated by ten times as many more. As for those who profess to have *personally known* Napoleon Bonaparte, and to have *themselves witnessed* his transactions, I write not for them: *if any such there be*, who are inwardly conscious of the truth of all they relate, I have nothing to say to them, but to beg that they will be tolerant and charitable towards their neighbors, who have not the same means of ascertaining the truth; and who may well be excused for remaining doubtful about such extraordinary events, till most unanswerable proofs shall be adduced.

Let us however endeavour to trace up some of this hear-say evidence as far towards its source as we are able. Most persons would refer to the *newspapers* as the authority from which their knowledge on the

* Οὕτως ἐπαλαίμωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις τῆς ἀληθείας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἱστοίμα μᾶλλον τρέπονται. Thucyd. b. i. c. 20.

† "With what greediness are the miraculous accounts of travelers received, their descriptions of sea and land monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners." *Hume's Essay on Miracles*, p. 178, 12mo.; p. 185, 8vo. 1767; p. 117, 8vo. 1817.

N. H. In order to give every possible facility of reference, three editions of Hume's *Essays* have been generally employed; a 12mo. London, 1756, and two 8vo. editions.

subject was derived: so that, generally speaking, we may say, it is on the testimony of the newspapers that men believe in the existence and exploits of Napoleon Bonaparte.

It is rather a remarkable circumstance, that it is common to hear Englishmen speak of the impudent fabrications of foreign newspapers, and express wonder that any one can be found to credit them; while they conceive that, in this favored land, the liberty of the press is a sufficient security for veracity. It is true they often speak contemptuously of such "newspaper stories" as last but a short time; indeed they continually see them contradicted within a day or two in the same paper, or their falsity detected by some journal of an opposite party; but still whatever is *long adhered to* and often *repeated*, especially if it also appear in *several different* papers, (and this, though they notoriously copy from one another,) is almost sure to be generally believed. Whence this high respect which is practically paid to newspaper authority? Do men think that because a witness has been perpetually detected in a falsehood, he may therefore be the more safely believed whenever he is *not* detected? or does adherence to a story, and frequent repetition of it, render it the more credible? On the contrary, is it not a common remark in other cases, that a liar will generally stand to and reiterate what he has once said, merely because he *has* said it?

Let us if possible divest ourselves of this superstitious veneration for every thing that appears "in print," and examine a little more systematically the evidence which is adduced.

I suppose it will not be denied, that the three following are among the most important points to be ascertained, in deciding on the credibility of witnesses; first, whether they have the means of gaining correct information; secondly, whether they have any interest in concealing truth, or propagating falsehood; and, thirdly, whether they agree in their testimony. Let us examine the present witnesses upon all these points.

First, what means have the editors of newspapers for gaining correct information? We know not, except from their own statements. Besides what is copied from other journals, foreign or British, (which is usually more than three-fourths of the news published,*) they profess to refer to the authority of certain private correspondents abroad; *who* these correspondents are, what means *they* have of obtaining information, or whether they exist at all, we have no way of ascertaining. We find ourselves in the condition of the Hindoos, who are told by their priests, that the earth stands on an elephant, and the elephant on a tortoise; but are left to find out for themselves what the tortoise stands on, or whether it stands on any thing at all.

* "Suppose a fact to be transmitted through twenty persons; the first communicating it to the second, the second to the third, &c., and let the probability of each testimony be expressed by nine-tenths, (that is, suppose that of ten reports made by each witness, nine only are true,) then, at every time the story passes from one witness to another the evidence is reduced to nine-tenths of what it was before. Thus after it has passed through the whole twenty, the evidence will be found to be less than one-eighth." LA PLACE. *Essai philosophique sur les probabilités*.

That is, the chances for the fact thus attested being true, will be, according to this distinguished calculator, less than one in eight. Very few of the common newspaper-stories however, relating to foreign countries, could be traced, if the matter were carefully investigated, up to an actual eye-witness, even through twenty intermediate witnesses; and many of the steps of our ladder would, I fear, prove but rotten; few of the reporters would deserve to have one in ten fixed as the proportion of their false accounts.

So much for our clear knowledge of the means of *information* possessed by these witnesses; next, for the grounds on which we are to calculate on their *veracity*.

Have they not a manifest interest in circulating the wonderful accounts of Napoleon Bonaparte and his achievements, whether true or false? Few would read newspapers if they did not sometimes find wonderful or important news in them; and we may safely say that no subject was ever found so inexhaustibly interesting as the present.

It may be urged, however, that there are several adverse political parties of which the various public prints are respectively the organs, and who would not fail to expose each other's fabrications.* Doubtless they would, if they could do so without at the same time exposing *their own*; but identity of interests may induce a community of operations up to a certain point. And let it be observed, that the object of contention between these rival parties is, *who* shall have the administration of public affairs, the control of public expenditure, and the disposal of places; the question, I say, is, not, whether the people shall be governed or not, but, *by which party* they shall be governed;—not whether the taxes shall be paid or not, but *who* shall receive them. Now it must be admitted, that Bonaparte is a political bugbear, most convenient to any administration: “if you do not adopt our measures and reject those of our opponents, Bonaparte will be sure to prevail over you; if you do not submit to the Government, at least under *our* administration this formidable enemy will take advantage of your insubordination, to conquer and enslave you: pay your taxes cheerfully, or the tremendous Bonaparte will take all from you.” Bonaparte, in short was the burden of every song; his redoubted name was the charm which always succeeded in unloosing the purse-strings of the nation. And let us not be too sure, safe as we now think ourselves, that some occasion may not occur for again producing on the stage so useful a personage: it is not merely to naughty children in the nursery that the threat of being “given to Bonaparte” has proved effectual.

It is surely probable, therefore, that, with an object substantially the same, all parties may have availed themselves of one common instrument. It is not necessary to suppose that for this purpose they secretly entered into a formal agreement: though by the way, there are reports afloat, that the editors of the *Courier* and *Morning Chronicle* hold amicable consultations as to the conduct of their public warfare: I will not take upon me to say that this is incredible; but at any rate it is not necessary for the establishment of the probability I contend for. Neither again would I imply that *all* newspaper-editors are utterers of forged stories “knowing them to be forged;” most likely the great majority of them publish what they find in other papers with the same simplicity that their readers peruse it; and therefore, it must be observed, are not at all more proper than their readers to be cited as authorities.

Still it will be said, that unless we suppose a regularly preconceived plan, we must at least expect to find great discrepancies in the accounts

* “I did not mention the difficulty of detecting a falsehood in any private or even public history, at the time and place where it is said to happen; much more where the scene is removed to ever so small a distance.

But the matter never comes to any issue, if trusted to the common method of altercation and debate and flying rumors.” *Hume's Essay on Miracles*, p. 195. 12mo.; p. 200, 201. 8vo. 1767; p. 127. 8vo. 1817.

published. Though they might adopt the general outline of facts, one from another, they would have to fill up the detail for themselves; and in this therefore we should meet with infinite and irreconcilable variety.

Now this is precisely the point I am tending to; for the fact exactly accords with the above supposition; the discordance and mutual contradictions of these witnesses being such as would alone throw a considerable shade of doubt over their testimony. It is not in minute circumstances alone that the discrepancy appears, such as might be expected to appear in a narrative substantially true; but in very great and leading transactions, and such as are very intimately connected with the supposed hero. For instance, it is by no means agreed whether Bonaparte led in person the celebrated charge over the bridge of Lodi, (for *celebrated* it certainly is, as well as the siege of Troy, whether either event ever really took place or no,) or was safe in the rear, while Augereau performed the exploit. The same doubt hangs over the charge of the French cavalry at Waterloo. It is no less uncertain whether or no this strange personage poisoned in Egypt an hospital full of his own soldiers; and butchered in cold blood a garrison that had surrendered. But not to multiply instances; the battle of Borodino, which is represented as one of the greatest ever fought, is unequivocally claimed as a victory by both parties; nor is the question decided at this day. We have official accounts on both sides, circumstantially detailed, in the names of supposed respectable persons, professing to have been present on the spot, yet totally irreconcilable. *Both* these accounts *may* be false; but since *one* of them *must* be false, that one (it is no matter *which* we suppose) proves incontrovertibly this important maxim; that *it is possible for a narrative—however circumstantial—however steadily maintained—however public, and however important, the events it relates—however grave the authority on which it is published—to be nevertheless an entire fabrication!*

Many of the events which have been recorded were probably believed much the more readily and firmly, from the apparent caution and hesitation with which they were at first published,—the vehement contradictions in our papers of many pretended French accounts,—and the abuse lavished upon them for falsehood, exaggeration, and gasconade. But is it not possible,—is it not indeed perfectly natural,—that the publishers even of known falsehood should assume this cautious demeanor, and this abhorrence of exaggeration, in order the more easily to gain credit? Is it not also very possible, that those who actually believed what they published, may have suspected mere *exaggeration*, in stories which were entire *fictions*? Many men have that sort of simplicity, that they think themselves quite secure against being deceived, provided they believe only *part* of the story they hear; when perhaps the whole is equally false. So that perhaps these simple-hearted editors, who were so vehement against lying bulletins, and so wary in announcing their great news, were in the condition of a clown, who thinks he has bought a great bargain of a Jew, because he has beat down the price perhaps from a guinea to a crown, for some article that is not really worth a groat.

With respect to the character of Bonaparte, the dissonance is if possible still greater. According to some he was a wise, humane, magnanimous hero: others paint him as a monster of cruelty, meanness, and perfidy: some, even of those who are the most inveterate against him, speak very highly of his political and military ability; others place him

on the very verge of insanity. But allowing that all this may be the coloring of party-prejudice, (which surely is allowing a great deal,) there is one point to which such a solution will hardly apply: if there be any thing that can be clearly ascertained in history, one would think it must be the *personal courage of a military man*; yet here we are as much at a loss as ever; at the very same times and on the same occasions, he is described by different writers as a man of undaunted intrepidity, and as an absolute poltroon.

What then are we to believe? if we are disposed to credit all that is told us, we must believe in the existence not only of one, but of two or three Bonapartes; if we admit nothing but what is well authenticated, we shall be compelled to doubt of the existence of any.*

It appears, then, that those on whose testimony the existence and actions of Bonaparte are generally believed, fail in ALL the most essential points on which the credibility of witnesses depends: first, we have no assurance that they have access to correct information; secondly, they have an apparent interest in propagating falsehood; and, thirdly, they palpably contradict each other in the most important points.

Another circumstance which throws additional suspicion on these tales is, that the whig party, as they are called,—the warm advocates for liberty, and opposers of the encroachments of monarchical power,—have for some time past strenuously espoused the cause, and vindicated the character of Bonaparte, who is represented by all as having been, if not a tyrant, at least an absolute despot. One of the most forward in this cause is a gentleman, who once stood foremost in holding up this very man to public execration,—who first published, and long maintained against popular incredulity, the accounts of his atrocities in Egypt. Now that such a course should be adopted, for party purposes, by those who are aware that the whole story is a fiction, and the hero of it imaginary, seems not very incredible: but if they believed in the real existence of this despot, I cannot conceive how they could so forsake their principles as to advocate his cause, and eulogize his character.

After all, it may be expected that many who perceive the force of these objections, will yet be loth to think it possible that they and the public at large can have been so long and so greatly imposed upon.—And thus it is that the magnitude and boldness of a fraud becomes its best support; the millions who for so many ages have believed in Mahomet or Brahma; lean as it were on each other for support; and not having vigor of mind enough boldly to throw off vulgar prejudices, and dare be wiser than the multitude, persuade themselves that what so many have acknowledged, must be true. But I call on those who boast their philosophical freedom of thought, and would fain tread in the steps of Hume and other inquirers of the like exalted and speculative genius, to follow up fairly and fully their own principles, and, throwing off the shackles of authority, to examine carefully the evidence of whatever is proposed to them, before they admit its truth.

That even in this enlightened age, as it is called, a whole nation may be egregiously imposed upon, even in matters which intimately concern them, may be proved (if it has not been already proved) by the follow-

* "We entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact, when the witnesses contradict each other; when they are of a suspicious character; when they have an interest in what they affirm." *Hume's Essay on Miracles*, p. 172. 12mo.; p. 176. 8vo. 1767; p. 113. 8vo. 1817.

ing instance; it was stated in the newspapers, that, a month after the battle of Trafalgar, an English officer, who had been a prisoner of war, and was exchanged, returned to this country from France, and, beginning to condole with his countrymen on the terrible defeat they had sustained, was infinitely astonished to learn that the battle of Trafalgar was a splendid victory: he had been assured, he said, that in that battle the English had been totally defeated; and the French were fully and universally persuaded that such was the fact. Now if this report of the belief of the French nation was *not* true, the British public were completely imposed upon; if it *were* true, then both nations were, at the same time, rejoicing in the event of the same battle, as a signal victory to themselves; and consequently one or other at least of these nations must have been the dupes of their Government: for if the battle was never fought at all, or was not decisive on either side, in that case both parties were deceived. This instance, I conceive, is absolutely demonstrative of the point in question.

"But what shall we say to the testimony of those many respectable persons who went to Plymouth on purpose, and saw Bonaparte with their own eyes? Must they not trust their senses?" I would not disparage either the eye-sight or the veracity of these gentlemen. I am ready to allow that they went to Plymouth for the purpose of seeing Bonaparte; nay more, that they actually rowed out into the harbor in a boat, and came along side of a man-of-war, on whose deck they saw a man in a cocked hat, who, *they were told*, was Bonaparte. This is the utmost point to which their testimony goes; how they ascertained that this man in the cocked hat had gone through all the marvellous and romantic adventures with which we have so long been amused, we are not told. Did they perceive in his physiognomy, his true name, and authentic history? Truly this evidence is such as country-people give one for a story of apparitions; if you discover any signs of incredulity, they triumphantly show the very house which the ghost haunted, the identical dark corner where it used to vanish, and perhaps even the tombstone of the person whose death it foretold. Jack Cade's nobility was supported by the same irresistible kind of evidence: having asserted that the eldest son of Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, was stolen by a beggar-woman, "became a bricklayer when he came to age," and was the father of the supposed Jack Cade: one of his companions confirms the story, by saying, "Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house, and the bricks are alive at this day to testify it; therefore deny it not."

Much of the same kind is the testimony of our brave countrymen, who are ready to produce the scars they received in fighting against this terrible Bonaparte. That they fought and were wounded, they may safely testify; and probably they no less firmly *believe* what they were *told* respecting the cause in which they fought: it would have been a high breach of discipline to doubt it; and they, I conceive, are men better skilled in handling a musket, than in sifting evidence, and detecting imposture. But I defy any one of them to come forward and declare, *on his own knowledge*, what was the cause in which he fought,—under whose commands the opposed generals acted,—and whether the person who issued those commands did really perform the mighty achievements we are told of.

Let those then who pretend to philosophical freedom of inquiry,—who scorn to rest their opinions on popular belief, and to shelter them-

selves under the example of the unthinking multitude, consider carefully each one for himself, what is the evidence proposed to himself in particular, for the existence of such a person as Napoleon Bonaparte : (I do not mean whether there ever was a person bearing that *name*, for that is a question of no consequence, but whether any such person ever performed all the wonderful things attributed to him) ; let him then weigh well the objections to that evidence, (of which I have given but a hasty and imperfect sketch,) and if he then finds it amount to any thing *more* than a probability, I have only to congratulate him on his easy faith.

But the same testimony which would have great weight in establishing a thing intrinsically probable, will lose part of this weight in proportion as the matter attested is improbable ; and if adduced in support of any thing that is at variance with uniform experience,* will be rejected at once by all sound reasoners. Let us then consider what sort of a story it is that is proposed to our acceptance. How grossly contradictory are the reports of the different authorities, I have already remarked : but consider, by itself, the story told by any one of them ; it carries an air of fiction and romance on the very face of it ; all the events are great, and splendid, and marvellous ;† great armies, great victories, great frosts, great reverses, “ hair-breadth ‘scapes,” empires subverted in a few days ; every thing happening in defiance of political calculations, and in opposition to the *experience* of past times ; every thing upon that grand scale, so common in epic poetry, so rare in real life ; and thus calculated to strike the imagination of the vulgar,—and to remind the sober-thinking few of the Arabian Nights. Every event, too, has that *roundness* and completeness which is so characteristic of fiction ; nothing is done by halves ; we have *complete* victories—*total* overthrows,—*entire* subversion of empires,—*perfect* reestablishments of them,—crowded upon us in rapid succession. To enumerate the improbabilities of each of the several parts of this history, would fill volumes : but they are so fresh in every one’s memory, that there is no need of such a detail : let any judicious man, not ignorant of history and of human nature, revolve them in his mind, and consider how far they are conformable to experience,‡ our best and only sure guide. In vain will he seek in history for something similar to this wonderful Bonaparte ; “ nought but himself can be his parallel.”

Will the conquests of Alexander be compared with his ? *They* were effected over a rabble of effeminate undisciplined barbarians ; else his progress would hardly have been so rapid : witness his father Philip, who was much longer occupied in subduing the comparatively insignificant territory of the warlike and civilized Greeks, notwithstanding their

* “ That testimony itself derives all its force from experience, seems very certain.

The first author we believe, who stated fairly the connexion between the evidence of testimony and the evidence of experience, was HUME, in his *Essay on Miracles*, a work . . . abounding in maxims of great use in the conduct of life.” *Edinb. Review*, Sept. 1814, p. 328.

† “ Suppose, for instance, that the fact which the testimony endeavors to establish partakes of the extraordinary and the marvellous ; in that case, the evidence resulting from the testimony receives a diminution, greater or less in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual.” *Hume’s Essay on Miracles*, p. 173. 12mo ; p. 176. 8vo. 1767 ; p. 113. 8vo. 1817.

‡ “ The ultimate standard by which we determine all disputes that may arise is always derived from experience and observation.” *Hume’s Essay on Miracles*, p. 179. 12mo. ; p. 175. 8vo. 1767 ; p. 112. 8vo. 1817.

being divided into numerous petty states, whose mutual jealousy enabled him to contend with them separately. But the Greeks had never made such progress in arts and arms as the great and powerful states of Europe, which Bonaparte is represented as so speedily overpowering. His empire has been compared to the Roman: mark the contrast; he gains in a few years, that dominion, or at least control, over Germany, wealthy, civilized, and powerful, which the Romans in the plenitude of their power could not obtain, during a struggle of as many centuries, against the ignorant half-savages who then possessed it!

Another peculiar circumstance in the history of this extraordinary personage is, that when it is found convenient to represent him as defeated, though he is by no means defeated by halves, but involved in much more sudden and total ruin than the personages of real history usually meet with; yet, if it is thought fit he should be restored, it is done as quickly and completely as if Merlin's rod had been employed. He enters Russia with a prodigious army, which is totally ruined by an unprecedented hard winter; (every thing relating to this man is *prodigious* and *unprecedented*;) yet in a few months we find him intrusted with another great army in Germany, which is also totally ruined at Leipzig; making, inclusive of the Egyptian, the third great army thus totally lost: yet the French are so good-natured as to furnish him with another, sufficient to make a formidable stand in France; he is however *conquered and presented with the sovereignty of Elba*; (surely, by-the-by, some more *probable* way might have been found of disposing of him, till again wanted, than to place him thus on the very verge of his ancient dominions;) thence he returns to France, where he is received with open arms, and enabled to lose a fifth great army at Waterloo: yet so eager were these people to be a sixth time led to destruction, that it was found necessary to confine *him* in an island some thousand miles off, and to quarter foreign troops upon *them*, lest they should make an insurrection in his favor! * Does any one believe a miracle? Or rather, what is this but a miracle? Is it not a violation of the laws of nature? for surely there are moral laws of nature as well as physical; which, though more liable to exceptions in this or that particular case, are no less *true as general rules* than the laws of matter, and therefore cannot be violated and contradicted *beyond a certain point*, without a miracle.†

* Ἡ θάματα πολλά

καὶ ποῦ τι καὶ βορῶν φένας

ἸΠΕΡ ΤΟΝ ΑΛΛΗΛ ΛΟΓΟΝ

Διδακταμένοι ψεύδει ποικίλοις

Ἐξαπατῶντι μῦθοι. Pind. Olymp. I.

† This doctrine, though hardly needing confirmation from authority, is supported by that of Hume: his eighth essay is, throughout, an argument for the doctrine of philosophical "necessity," drawn entirely from the general uniformity observable in the course of nature with respect to the principles of *human conduct*, as well as those of the material universe; from which uniformity, he observes, it is that we are enabled, in *both cases*, to form our judgments by means of *experience*: "and if," says he, "we would explode any forgery in history, we cannot make use of a more convincing argument, than to prove that the actions ascribed to any person, are directly contrary to the course of nature."

The veracity of Quintus Curtius is as suspicious when he describes the supernatural courage of Alexander, by which he was hurried on singly to attack multitudes, as when he describes his supernatural force and activity, by which he was able to resist them. So readily and universally do we acknowledge a *uniformity in human motives and actions as well as in the operations of body.*" *Eighth Essay*, p. 131. 12mo.; p. 85. 8vo. 1817.

Accordingly, in the tenth essay, his use of the term "miracle," after having said "it is a transgression of a law of nature," plainly shows that he meant to include he

Nay, there is this additional circumstance which renders the contradiction of experience more glaring in this case than in that of the miraculous histories which ingenious sceptics have held up to contempt: all the advocates of miracles admit that they are rare exceptions to the general course of nature; but contend that they must needs be so, on account of the rarity of those extraordinary *occasions* which are the *reason* of their being performed: a miracle, they say, does not happen every day, because a revelation is not given every day. It would be foreign to the present purpose to seek for arguments against this answer; I leave it to those who are engaged in the controversy, to find a reply to it; but my present object is, to point out that this solution does not at all apply in the present case. Where is the peculiarity of the *occasion*? What sufficient *reason* is there for a series of events occurring in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which never took place before? Was Europe at that period peculiarly weak, and in a state of barbarism, that one man could achieve such conquests, and acquire such a vast empire? On the contrary, she was flourishing in the height of strength and civilization. Can the persevering attachment and blind devotedness of the French to this man, be accounted for by his being the descendant of a long line of kings, whose race was hallowed by hereditary veneration? No; we are told he was a low-born usurper, and not even a Frenchman! Is it that he was a good and kind sovereign? he is represented not only as an imperious and merciless despot, but as most wantonly careless of the lives of his soldiers. Could the French army and people have failed to hear from the wretched survivors of his supposed Russian expedition, how they had left the corpses of above 100,000 of their comrades bleaching on the snow-drifts of that dismal country, whither his mad ambition had conducted them, and where his selfish cowardice had deserted them? Wherever we turn to seek for circumstances that may help to account for the events of this incredible story, we only meet with such as aggravate its improbability.* Had it been told of some distant country, at a remote

same nature: no testimony," says he, "is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a nature that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish:" the term "prodigy" also (which he all along employs as synonymous "with miracle" is applied to testimony, in the same manner, immediately after: "In the foregoing reasoning we have supposed . . . that the falsehood of that testimony would be a kind of prodigy." Now had he meant to confine the meaning of "miracle," and "prodigy," to a violation of the laws of *nature*, the epithet "*miraculous*," applied, even thus hypothetically, to *false testimony*, would be as unmeaning as the epithets "green," or "square;" the only possible sense in which we can apply to it, even in imagination, the term "miraculous," is that of "highly improbable,"—"contrary to those laws of nature which respect human conduct:" and in this sense accordingly he uses the word in the very next sentence: "When any one tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself whether it be more *probable* that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact which he relates should really have happened. I weigh the one *miracle* against the other." *Hume's Essay on Miracles*, p. 176, 177. 12mo.; p. 182. 8vo. 1767; p. 115. 8vo. 1817.

See also a passage above quoted from the same essay, where he speaks of "the miraculous accounts of travelers;" evidently using the word in this sense. Perhaps it was superfluous to cite authority for applying the term "miracle" to whatever is highly "improbable;" but it is important to the students of Hume to be fully aware that he uses those two expressions as synonymous; since otherwise they would mistake the meaning of that passage which he justly calls "a general maxim worthy of our attention."

* "Events may be so extraordinary that they can hardly be established by testimony. We would not give credit to a man who would affirm that he saw an hund-

period, we could not have told what peculiar circumstances there might have been to render probable what seems to us most strange; and yet in *that* case every philosophical sceptic; every free-thinking speculator, would instantly have rejected such a history, as utterly unworthy of credit. What, for instance, would the great Hume, or any of the philosophers of his school have said, if they had found in the antique records of any nation such a passage as this; "There was a Certain man of Corsica, whose name was Napoleon, and he was one of the chief captains of the host of the French: and he gathered together an army, and went and fought against Egypt; but when the king of Britain heard thereof, he sent ships of war and valiant men to fight against the French in Egypt. So they warred against them, and prevailed, and strengthened the hands of the rulers of the land against the French, and drove away Napoleon from before the city of Acre. Then Napoleon left the captains and the army that were in Egypt, and fled, and returned back to France. So the French people took Napoleon, and made him ruler over them, and he became exceeding great, insomuch that there was none like him of all that had ruled over France before."

What, I say, would Hume have thought of this, especially if he had been told that it was at this day generally credited? Would he not have confessed that he had been mistaken in supposing there was a peculiarly blind credulity and prejudice in favor of every thing that is accounted *sacred*;* for that, since even professed sceptics swallow implicitly such a story as this, it appears there must be a still blinder prejudice in favor of every thing that is *not* accounted sacred?

Suppose, again, we found in this history such passages as the following; "And it came to pass after these things that Napoleon strengthened himself, and gathered together another host instead of that which he had lost, and went and warred against the Prussians, and the Russians, and the Austrians, and all the rulers of the north country, which were confederate against him. And the ruler of Sweden also, which was a Frenchman, warred against Napoleon. So they went forth, and fought against the French in the plain of Leipsic. And the French were discomfited before their enemies, and fled, and came to the rivers which are behind Leipsic, and essayed to pass over, that they might escape out of the hand of their enemies; but they could not; for Napoleon had broken down the bridges; so the people of the north countries came upon them, and smote them with a very grievous slaughter"

"Then the ruler of Austria and all the rulers of the north countries sent messengers unto Napoleon to speak peaceably unto him, saying, Why should there be war between us any more? Now Napoleon had put away his wife, and taken the daughter of the ruler of Austria to wife. So all the counsellors of Napoleon came and stood before him, and said, Behold now these kings are merciful kings; do even as they say unto thee; knowest thou not yet that France is destroyed? But

red dice thrown in the air, and that they all fell on the same faces." *Edinb. Review*, Sept. 1814, p. 327.

Let it be observed, that the instance here given is *miraculous* in no other sense but that of being highly *improbable*.

* "If the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony in these circumstances loses all pretensions to authority." *Hume's Essay on Miracles*, p. 179. 12mo; p. 185, 8vo. 1767; p. 117. 8vo. 1817.

he spake roughly unto his counsellors, and drave them out from his presence, neither would he hearken unto their voice. And when all the kings saw that, they warred against France, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and came near to Paris, which is the royal city, to take it; so the men of Paris went out, and delivered up the city to them. Then those kings spake kindly unto the men of Paris, saying, be of good cheer, there shall no harm happen unto you. Then were the men of Paris glad, and said, Napoleon is a tyrant; he shall no more rule over us: also all the princes, the judges, the counsellors, and the captains, whom Napoleon had raised up, even from the lowest of the people, sent unto Louis the brother of King Louis, whom they had slain, and made him king over France."

"And when Napoleon saw that the kingdom was departed from him, he said unto the rulers which came against him, Let me, I pray you, give the kingdom unto my son: but they would not hearken unto him. Then he spake yet again, saying, Let me, I pray you, go and live in the island of Elba, which is over against Italy, nigh unto the coast of France; and ye shall give me an allowance for me and my household, and the land of Elba also for a possession. So they made him ruler of Elba."

"In those days the Pope returned unto his own land. Now the French, and divers other nations of Europe, are servants of the Pope, and hold him in reverence: but he is an abomination unto the Britons, and to the Prussians, and to the Russians, and to the Swedes. Howbeit the French had taken away all his lands, and robbed him of all that he had, and carried him away captive into France. But when the Britons, and the Prussians, and the Russians, and the Swedes, and the rest of the nations that were confederate against France, came thither, they caused the French to set the Pope at liberty, and to restore all his goods that they had taken; likewise they gave him back all his possessions; and he went home in peace, and ruled over his own city as in times past."

"And it came to pass when Napoleon had not yet been a full year at Elba, that he said unto his men of war which clave unto him, go to, let us go back to France, and fight against King Louis, and thrust him out from being king. So he departed, he and 600 men with him that drew the sword, and warred against King Louis. Then all the men of Belial gathered themselves together, and said, God save Napoleon. And when Louis saw that, he fled, and gat him into the land of Batavia: and Napoleon ruled over France." &c. &c. &c.

Now if a free-thinking philosopher—one of those who advocate the cause of unbiassed reason, and despise pretended revelations—were to meet with such a tissue of absurdities as this, in an old Jewish record, would not reject it at once as too palpable an imposture* to deserve even

* "I desire any one to lay his hand upon his heart, and after serious consideration declare, whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a book, supported by such testimony, would be more extraordinary and miraculous than all the miracles it relates." *Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles*, p. 200. 12mo.; p. 206. 8vo. 1767; p. 131. 8vo. 1817.

Let it be borne in mind, that Hume (as I have above remarked) continually em-

any inquiry into its evidence? Is that credible then of the civilized Europeans now, which could not, if reported of the semi-barbarous Jews 3000 years ago, be established by any testimony? Will it be answered, that, "there is nothing *supernatural* in all this?" Why is it, then, that you object to what is *supernatural*—that you reject every account of *miracles*—if not because they are *improbable*? Surely then a story equally or still more improbable, is not to be implicitly received, merely on the ground that it is *not* miraculous: though in fact, as I have already (in note p. 33.) shown from Hume's authority, it really is miraculous. The opposition to experience has been proved to be as complete in this case, as in what are commonly called miracles; and the reason assigned for that contrariety by the defenders of *them*, cannot be pleaded in the present instance. If then philosophers, who reject every wonderful story that is maintained by priests, are yet found ready to believe *every thing else*, however improbable, they will surely lay themselves open to the accusation brought against them of being unduly prejudiced against whatever relates to religion.

There is one more circumstance which I cannot forbear mentioning, because it so much adds to the air of fiction which pervades every part of this marvellous tale; and that is, the *nationality* of it.*

Bonaparte prevailed over all the hostile states in turn *except England*; in the zenith of his power, his fleets were swept from the sea by *England*; his troops always defeat an equal, and frequently even a superior number of those of any other nation, *except the English*; and with them it is just the reverse; twice and twice only, he is personally engaged against an *English commander*, and both times he is totally defeated; at Acre and at Waterloo; and, to crown all, *England* finally crushes this tremendous power, which has so long kept the continent in subjection or in alarm, and to the *English* he surrenders himself prisoner! Thoroughly national to be sure! It *may* be all very true; but I would only ask, if a story *had* been fabricated for the express purpose of amusing the English nation, could it have been contrived more ingeniously? It would do admirably for an epic poem; and indeed bears a considerable resemblance to the *Iliad* and the *Æneid*; in which Achilles and the Greeks, Æneas and the Trojans, (the ancestors of the Romans,) are so studiously held up to admiration. Bonaparte's exploits seem magnified in order to enhance the glory of his conquerors; just as Hector is allowed to triumph during the absence of Achilles, merely to give additional splendor to his overthrow by the arm of that invincible hero. Would not this circumstance alone render a history rather *suspicious* in the eyes of an acute critic, even if it were not filled with such gross improbabilities; and induce him to suspend his judgment, till very satisfactory evidence (far stronger than can be found in this case) should be produced.

Is it then too much to demand of the wary academic† a suspension of judgment as to the "life and adventures of Napoleon Bonaparte?" I

plays the terms "miracle" and "prodigy" to signify any thing that is highly *improbable* and *extraordinary*.

* "The wise lend a very academic faith to every report which favors the passion of the reporter, whether it magnifies his *country*, his family, or himself. *Hume's Essay on Miracles*, p. 144. 12mo.; p. 200. 8vo. 1767; p. 128. 8vo. 1817.

† "Nothing can be more contrary than such a philosophy" (the academic or sceptical) "to the supine indolence of the mind, its rash arrogance, its lofty pretensions, and its superstitious credulity." *Fifth Essay*, p. 68. 12mo.; p. 41. 8vo. 1817.

do not pretend to *decide* positively that there is not, nor ever was, any such person ; but merely to oppose it as a *doubtful* point, and one the more deserving of careful investigation, from the very circumstance of its having hitherto been admitted without inquiry. Far less would I undertake to decide what is, or has been, the real state of affairs : he who points out the improbability of the current story, is not bound to suggest an hypothesis of his own ;* though it may safely be affirmed, that it would be hard to invent any, more improbable than the received one. One may surely be allowed to hesitate in admitting the stories which the ancient poets tell, of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions being caused by imprisoned giants, without being called upon satisfactorily to account for those phenomena.

Amidst the defect of valid evidence under which, as I have already shown, we labor in the present instance, it is hardly possible to offer more than here and there a probable conjecture ; or to pronounce how much may be true, and how much fictitious, in the accounts presented to us. For it is to be observed that this case is much *more* open to sceptical doubts even than some miraculous histories ; for some of them are of such a nature that you cannot consistently admit a part and reject the rest ; but are bound, if you are satisfied as to the reality of any one miracle, to embrace the whole system ; so that it is necessary for the sceptic to impeach the evidence of *all* of them, separately, and collectively : whereas *here*, each single point requires to be *established* separately, since no one of them authenticates the rest. Supposing there be a state-prisoner at St. Helena, (which, by the way, it is acknowledged many of the French disbelieve,) how do we know who he is, or why he is confined there ? There have been state-prisoners before now, who were never guilty of subjugating half Europe, and whose offences have been very imperfectly ascertained. Admitting that there have been bloody wars going on for several years past, which is highly probable, it does not follow that the events of those wars were such as we have been told ;—that Bonaparte was the author and conductor of them ;—or that such a person ever existed. What disturbances may have taken place in the government of the French people, we, and even nineteen-twentieths of *them*, have no means of learning but from imperfect hear-say evidence : but that there have been numerous bloody wars with France under the dominion of the *Bourbons*, we are well assured : and we are now told that France is governed by a Bourbon king, of the name of Louis, who professes to be in the twenty-third year of his reign. Let every one conjecture for himself. I am far from pretending to decide who may have been the governor or governors of the French nation, and the leaders of their armies, for several years past. Certain it is, that when men are indulging their inclination for the marvellous, they always show a strong propensity to accumulate upon one individual (real or imaginary) the exploits of many ; besides multiplying and exaggerating these exploits a thousand-fold. Thus, the expounders of the ancient mythology tell us there were several persons of the name of Hercules, (either originally bearing that appellation, or having it applied to them as an honor,) whose collective feats, after being dressed up in a sufficiently marvellous garb, were attributed to a single hero. Is it not just as possible, that during the rage for words

* See Hume's *Essay on Miracles*, p. 189, 191, 195. 12mo. ; p. 193, 197, 201, 202. 8vo. 1767 ; p. 124, 125, 126. 8vo. 1817.

of Greek derivation, the title of "Napoleon" (*Napoleon*), which signifies "Lion of the forest," may have been conferred by the popular voice on more than one favorite general, distinguished for irresistible valor? Is it not also possible that "BUONA PARTE" may have been originally a sort of cant term applied to the "good (i. e. the bravest or most patriotic) part" of the French army, collectively; and have been afterwards mistaken for the proper name of an individual? I do not profess to support this conjecture; but it is certain that such mistakes may and do occur. Some critics have supposed that the Athenians imagined ANASTASIS ("Resurrection") to be a new goddess, in whose cause Paul was preaching. Would it have been thought any thing incredible if we had been told that the ancient Persians, who had no idea of any but a monarchical government, had supposed Aristocrata to be a queen of Sparta? But we need not confine ourselves to hypothetical cases; it is positively stated that the Hindoos at this day believe "the honorable East India Company" to be a venerable old Lady of high dignity, residing in this country. The Germans of the present day derive their name from a similar mistake; the first tribe of them who invaded Gaul* assumed the honorable title of "*Ger-man*," which signifies "warrior;" (the words "war," and "guerre," as well as "man," which remains in our language unaltered, are evidently derived from the Tuetic, and the Gauls applied this as a *name*, to the whole *race*.)

However, I merely throw out these conjectures without by any means contending that more plausible ones might not be suggested. But whatever supposition we adopt, or whether we adopt any, the objections to the commonly-received accounts will remain in their full force, and imperiously demand the attention of the candid sceptic.

I call upon those therefore who profess themselves advocates of free inquiry,—who disdain to be carried along with the stream of popular opinion,—and who will listen to no testimony that runs counter to experience,—to follow up their own principles fairly and consistently. Let the same mode of argument be adopted in all cases alike; and then it can no longer be attributed to hostile prejudice, but to enlarged and philosophical views. If they have already rejected some histories, on the ground of their being strange and marvellous,—of their relating facts, unprecedented, and at variance with the established course of nature,—let them not give credit to another history which lies open to the very same objections,—the extraordinary and romantic tale we have been just considering. If they have discredited the testimony of witnesses, who are *said* at least to have been disinterested, and to have braved persecutions and death in support of their assertions,—can these philosophers consistently listen to and believe the testimony of those who avowedly *get money* by the tales they publish, and who do not even pretend that they incur any serious risk in case of being detected in a falsehood? If in other cases they have refused to listen to an account which has passed through many intermediate hands before it reaches them, and which is defended by those who have an interest in maintaining it; let them consider through how many, and what very suspicious hands, *this* story has arrived to them, without the possibility (as I have

* Germanis vocabulum recens et nuper additum; quoniam, qui primi Rhenum transgressi Gallos expulerint, ac nunc Tungri, tunc Germani vocati sint: ita nomen in nomen gentis evaluisse paulatim, ut omnes, primum a victore ob metum, mox a seipso invento nomine, Germani vocarentur. Tacitus, de Mor. Germ.

shown) of tracing it back to any decidedly authentic source, after all ;* and likewise how strong an interest, in every way, those who have hitherto imposed on them, have, in keeping up the imposture. Let them, in short, show themselves as ready to detect the cheats, and despise the fables, of politicians, as of priests.

But if they are still wedded to the popular belief in this point, let them be consistent enough to admit the same evidence in *other* cases, which they yield to, in *this*. If after all that has been said, they cannot bring themselves to doubt of the existence of Napoleon Bonaparte, they must at least acknowledge that they do not apply to that question, the same plan of reasoning which they have made use of in others ; and they are consequently bound in reason and in honesty to renounce it altogether.

* For let it not be forgotten, that these writers, *themselves*, refer to no better authority than that of an *un-named and unknown* foreign correspondent.

POSTSCRIPT TO THE THIRD EDITION.

It may seem arrogant for an obscure and nameless individual to claim the glory of having put to death the most formidable of all recorded heroes ; but a shadowy champion may be overthrown by a shadowy antagonist. Many a terrific spectre has been laid by the beams of a halfpenny candle. And if I have succeeded in making out, in the foregoing pages, a probable case of suspicion, it must, I think, be admitted, that there is some ground for my present boast, of having *killed* Napoleon Bonaparte.

Let but the circumstances of the case be considered :—This mighty Emperor, who had been so long the bugbear of the civilized world, after having obtained successes and undergone reverses, such as never befel any (other at least) *real* potentate, was at length sentenced to confinement in the remote island of St. Helena : a measure which many persons wondered at, and many objected to, on various grounds ; not unreasonably, supposing the illustrious exile to be a real person : but on the supposition of his being only a man of straw, the situation was exceedingly favorable for keeping him out of the way of impertinent curiosity, when not wanted, and for making him the foundation of any new plots that there might be occasion to conjure up.

About this juncture it was that the public attention was first invited by these pages, to the question as to the real existence of Napoleon Bonaparte. They excited, it may be fairly supposed, along with much surprise and much censure, some degree of doubt, and, probably of consequent inquiry. No fresh evidence, as far as I can learn, of the truth of the disputed points, was brought forward to dispel these doubts. We heard, however, of the most jealous precautions being used to prevent any intercourse between the formidable prisoner, and any stranger, who from motives of curiosity, might wish to visit him. The "man in the iron mask" could hardly have been more rigorously secluded : and we

also heard various contradictory reports of conversations between him and the few who were allowed access to him : the falsehood and inconsistency of most of these reports being proved in contemporary publications.

At length, just about the time when the public scepticism respecting this extraordinary personage might be supposed to have risen to an alarming height, it was announced to us that he was dead! A stop was thus put, most opportunely, to all troublesome inquiries. I do not undertake to deny that such a person did live and die. That he was, and that he did, *every thing* that was reported, we cannot believe, unless we consent to admit contradictory statements ; but many of the events recorded, however marvellous, are certainly not physically impossible.— But I would only entreat the candid reader to reflect what might naturally be expected, on the supposition of the surmises contained in the present work being well-founded. Supposing the whole of the tale I have been considering to have been a fabrication, what would be the natural result of such an attempt to excite inquiry into its truth? Evidently the shortest and most effectual mode of eluding detection would be to *kill* the phantom, and so get rid of him at once. A ready and decisive answer would thus be provided to any one in whom the foregoing arguments might have excited suspicions : “ Sir, there can be no doubt such a person existed, and performed what is related of him ; and if you will just take a voyage to St. Helena, you may see with your own eyes, —not him indeed, for he is no longer living,—but his *tomb* : and what evidence would you have that is more decisive?”

So much for his *Death* : as for his *Life*,—it is just published by an eminent writer : besides which, the shops will supply us with abundance of busts and prints of this great man ; all striking likenesses—of one another. The most incredulous must be satisfied with this ! “ Stat magni NOMINIS umbra !”

KONX OMPAX.

POSTSCRIPT TO THE SOCIETY'S EDITION.

It is a remark not unfrequently made that men are apt to speak much of qualities not possessed by themselves but which they desire to have the reputation of possessing. The secretly dishonest will thus display great admiration of honesty, and one whose heart is an iceberg will speak in raptures of generosity.

It seems to be thus with the enemies of true religion. They invariably laud the powers of the human mind and lay claim to reason, as if it was to be found only on their side. If the Bible is to be attacked, the title of the work must be “the Age of Reason” or “a calm and rational inquiry,” or “a Philosophical Essay.”

This assumption on the part of Infidel writers may indeed be pardoned, since the only semblance of philosophy or reason to be found in such works is for the most part confined to the title page.

We can pardon it also on another ground. The mind of the poor

and much to be pitied Infidel is too full of prejudice to see things as they really are ; could we see the workings of his tost spirit we would probably in every instance be able to trace his attack upon religion to a conscience ill at ease, which induces him to employ every effort which subtlety and deceit can suggest to defend the citadel of his heart endangered by the force of truth.

There has been something in the character or condition of these writers so far as known, plainly indicating that this is the case. If the Bible be true, they know that they are lost, and hence like the thief who afraid of discovery cries to his companion "put out that light" they, afraid of the light and the truth of Jehovah's word, cry also to their companions "*put out THAT light.*"

But though we can pardon their exclusive assumption of reason, we cannot acknowledge the correctness of their position. There never has been a fair and reasonable attack made on the Religion of the Bible and the cause is obvious. Reason and common sense give the enemies of Jesus no ground to stand on in *their* field, not an inch.

What is the religion of the Bible? It is summed up in these two requirements, love your Maker and your fellow man. What would be the result then if this Religion was universally practised. The happiness of Eden would again visit our earth. Sorrow and misery would be unknown, every mountain, valley, and cave would be vocal with praise, and the face of each inhabitant radiant with happiness.

We ask, then, can men, on any reasonable or philosophical grounds, oppose such a religion? Is there aught of reason, or philanthropy, or manliness in the attempt to prevent the spread of such principles, and to leave the unmitigated evils of mortality resting on our world, even though these principles were unsupported by sufficient evidence. Surely every noble and manly soul will reply, be the Bible a thing of earth or Heaven every one who regards the happiness of his fellow, must and will sustain it.

Infidel writers are aware of this, and hence, (we repeat it) there never has been a fair and honest and honorable attack made on *true Christianity*.

They either first misrepresent it and then attack the figment of their own brain ; (they do not and dare not go to the Bible and attack the system found there) or else they lay down, with an affectation of disinterestedness, rules and principles to be applied to the external evidences of its divinity, which they would not be disposed to admit in any other investigation.

Among this latter class the celebrated Mr Hume is to be placed, and it is to show the practical unsoundness and unreasonableness of these writers generally, and of Mr. Hume in particular, that the foregoing work was prepared and published.

Mr. Hume (like all others of his class) leaves unnoticed the intrinsic worth of the Bible ; but assumes the ground that on principles of reason and philosophy it is unworthy of credit, because the miracles recorded as proofs that it came from God, cannot in the nature of the case be evidence to us. They are such unusual facts, so very wonderful and marvellous that we ought not to give them any credit ; we ought, since we know that men sometimes say what is not true, to believe that the sacred writers were unworthy of credit.

This position, Mr. Hume, has with great ingenuity and rhetorical beauty amplified and dignified as a philosophical argument. This argument (if indeed it can be called so) has been triumphantly answered by vari-

ous writers, and the Editing Committee would refer those of their readers who would like to see a statement of it, to a tract of Dr. Brownlee's No 227 of the publications of the A. T. S.

We would also remark that we have been induced to publish this little work, entitled *Historic Doubts*, though not exactly of the character of our intended publications, inasmuch as we were unanimously of the opinion that it would not only show the dishonesty and unreasonableness of the objections of Mr. Hume, and other infidels, but be read with much interest for its own intrinsic merit.

The author, the justly celebrated Arch-bishop of Dublin, has with great felicity taken the positions of that class of Infidels of which Mr. Hume may be considered the head, and applied them to the history of Napoleon Bonaparte in the same manner as Mr. Hume applies them to destroy the evidence for the truth of the Bible; and every reader will see at once, that if men should carry the same kind of incredulity into the common concerns of life, our knowledge would be circumscribed to those things alone which fall under our immediate observation. He will also perceive from this work that on infidel principles it would be more easy to erect an argument which would prove that such a man as Gen. Washington had never existed, except in the minds of a few credulous fools—than from the same argument, to prove that the Bible is not Jehovah's work. Nay more, they will perceive that there is not a recorded event of ancient or modern history, if in the least uncommon which might not be proved unfounded in fact if subjected to the cavils which have been urged against the Bible. Nor should we forget that so far as utility goes, the Bible really needs no such evidence. To an honest and unprejudiced mind it contains in itself its own evidence. Should we, on some distant heathen shore, never having heard of Jehovah and salvation, find this book, we would require no evidence to prove to us that it came from God. This has been done. The child of God has been found in a heathen land, made so by no other human instrumentality than the circulation of one of the Gospels. But the Committee would also add, that they would do injustice to the author of this pamphlet and to their own cause if they were to assert that the above mentioned design was the only one that the author had in view or that his work only showed the effects of the infidel argument against the Bible when that argument is directed against other and acknowledged histories.

This little work does far more than this. The Bible has often undergone the test of this very argument and undergone it triumphantly. It is the identical one with perhaps a single exception that writers on the evidences of Christianity adduce to show that the Bible is what it professes to be. We are therefore taught these important truths by this work,

I. That no history of nations or individuals can bear unscathed the same investigation as the Bible.

II. That no history of events, of ancient or modern times, can claim the actual amount of evidence for its correctness that is brought for the establishment of the Bible as the word of God, and hence

III. That if any man rejects the Bible as God's word he does it on other grounds than a want of evidence.

EDITING COMMITTEE.

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A

SHORT AND EASY METHOD

WITH

T H E D E I S T S .

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

BY THE REV. CHARLES LESLIE, M. A.

New-York :

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OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

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A SHORT AND EASY

METHOD WITH THE DEISTS.

SIR—In answer to yours of the third instant, I much condole with you your unhappy circumstances, of being placed among such company, where, as you say, you continually hear the sacred Scriptures, and histories therein contained, particularly of Moses, and of Christ, and all revealed religion, turned into ridicule by men who set up for sense and reason. And they say, that there is no greater ground to believe in Christ than in Mohammed; that all these pretences to revelation are cheats, and ever have been among Pagans, Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians; that they are alike impositions of cunning and signing men, upon the credulity, at first, of simple and unthinking people, till, their numbers increasing, their delusions grew popular, came at last to be established by laws; and then the force of education and custom gives a bias to the judgments of after ages, till such deceits come easily to be believed, being received upon trust from the ages foregoing, without examining into the original and bottom of them. Which these modern men of sense (as they desire to be esteemed) say, that they only do, that they only have their judgments freed from the slavish authority of precedents and laws, in matters of truth, which, they say, ought only to be decided by reason; though by a prudent compliance with popularity and laws, they preserve themselves from outrage, and legal penalties; for none of their complexion are addicted to sufferings and martyrdom.

Now, sir, that which you desire from me, is, some short topic of reason, if such can be found, whereby, without running to authorities, and the intricate mazes of learning, which breed long disputes, and which these men of reason deny by wholesale, though they can give no reason for it, only suppose that authors have been trumped upon us, interpolated, and corrupted, so that no stress can be laid upon them, though it cannot be shown wherein they are so corrupted; which, in reason, ought to lie upon them to prove who allege it; otherwise it is not only precarious, but a guilty plea: and the more, that they refrain not to write books on their side, for whose authority there are no better, or not so good grounds. However, you say, it makes your disputes endless, and they go away with noise and clamor, and a boast, that there is nothing, at least nothing certain, to be said on the Christian side. Therefore you are desirous to find some *one topic of reason*, which should demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, and at the same time distinguish it from the impostures of Mohammed, and the old Pagan world:

that our deists may be brought to this test, and be either obliged to renounce their reason, and the common reason of mankind, or to submit to the clear proof, from reason, of the Christian religion, which must be such a proof as no imposture can pretend to, otherwise it cannot prove the Christian religion not to be an imposture. And whether such a proof, one single proof, (to avoid confusion) is not to be found out, you desire to know from me.

And you say, that you cannot imagine but there must be such a proof, because every truth is in itself clear, and one; and therefore that one reason for it, if it be the true reason, must be sufficient; and, if sufficient, it is better than many; for multiplicity confounds, especially to weak judgments.

Sir, you have imposed a hard task upon me: I wish I could perform it: for though every truth is one, yet our sight is so feeble, that we cannot always come to it directly, but by many inferences, and laying of things together.

But I think that in the case before us, there is such a proof as you require, and I will set it down as short and plain as I can.

I. First, then, I suppose, that the truth of the doctrine of Christ will be sufficiently evinced, if the matters of fact which are recorded of him in the Gospels be true; for his miracles, if true, do vouch the truth of what he delivered.

The same is to be said as to Moses. If he brought the children of Israel through the Red sea, in that miraculous manner, which is related in Exodus, and did such other wonderful things as are there told of him, it must necessarily follow, that he was sent from God. These being the strongest proofs we can desire, and which every deist will confess he would acquiesce in, if he saw them with his eyes. Therefore the stress of this cause will depend upon the proof of these matters of fact.

And the method I will take, is, first, to lay down such rules as to the truth of matters of fact, in general, that where they all meet, such matters of fact cannot be false. And then, secondly, to show that all these rules do meet in the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ; and that they do not meet in the matters of fact of Mohammed, of the heathen deities, nor can possibly meet in any imposture whatsoever.

The rules are these:

1. That the matter of fact be such, as that men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it.
2. That it be done publicly, in the face of the world.
3. That not only public monuments be kept up in memory of it, but some outward actions to be performed.
4. That such monuments and such actions or observances be instituted, and do commence from the time that the matter of fact was done.

The two first rules make it impossible for any such matter of fact to be imposed upon men, at the time when such matter of fact was said to be done, because every man's eyes and senses would contradict it. For example; suppose any man should pretend, that yesterday he divided the Thames, in presence of all the people of London, and carried the whole city, men, women and children, over to Southwark on dry land, the water standing like walls on both sides: I say, it is morally impossible that he could persuade the people of London that this was true, when every man, woman and child, could contradict him, and say, this.

was a notorious falsehood, for that they had not seen the Thames so divided, nor had gone over on dry land. Therefore I take it for granted, and I suppose, with the allowance of all the deists in the world) that no such imposition could be put upon men, at the time when such public matter of fact was said to be done.

Therefore it only remains, that such matter of fact might be invented some time after, when the men of that generation, wherein the thing was said to be done, are all past and gone; and the credulity of after ages might be imposed upon, to believe that things were done in former ages, which were not.

And for this the two last rules secure us as much as the two first rules, in the former case; for whenever such a matter of fact came to be invented, if not only monuments were said to remain of it, but likewise that public actions and observances were constantly used ever since the matter of fact was said to be done; the deceit must be detected, by no such monuments appearing, and by the experience of every man, woman, and child, who must know that no such actions or observances were ever used by them. For example, suppose I should now invent a story of such a thing, done a thousand years ago, I might perhaps get some to believe it; but if I say, that not only such a thing was done, but that from that day to this, every man, at the age of twelve years, had a joint of his little finger cut off; and that every man in the nation did want a joint of such a finger; and that this institution was said to be a part of the matter of fact done so many years ago, and vouched as a proof and confirmation of it, and as having descended without interruption, and been constantly practised, in memory of such matter of fact all along, from the time that such matter of fact was done: I say, it is impossible I should be believed in such a case, because every one could contradict me, as to the mark of cutting off a joint of the finger; and that being part of my original matter of fact, must demonstrate the whole to be false.

II. Let us now come to the second point, to show, that the matters of fact of Moses, and of Christ, have all these rules or marks before mentioned; and that neither the matters of fact of Mohammed, or what is reported of the heathen deities, have the like; and that no imposture can have them all.

As to Moses, I suppose it will be allowed me, that he could not have persuaded six hundred thousand men, that he had brought them out of Egypt, through the Red sea; fed them forty years without bread, by miraculous manna, and the other matters of fact recorded in his books, if they had not been true. Because every man's senses that were then alive, must have contradicted it. And therefore he must have imposed upon all their senses, if he could have made them believe it, when it was false, and no such things done. So that here are the first and second of the above mentioned four marks.

For the same reason it was equally impossible for him to have made them receive his five books as truth, and not to have rejected them, as a manifest imposture; which told of all these things as done before their eyes, if they had not been so done. See how positively he speaks to them, Deut. xi. 2—8, "And know you this day, for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his

stretched out arm, and his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt, unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land, and what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you: and how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day: and what he did unto you in the wilderness until ye came into this place: and what he did unto Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, how the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel. But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord, which he did," &c.

From hence we must suppose it impossible that these books of Moses, (if an imposture) could have been invented and put upon the people, who were then alive when all these things were said to be done.

The utmost, therefore, that even a *suppose* can stretch to, is, that these books were wrote in some age after Moses, and put out in his name.

And to this I say, that if it was so, it was impossible that those books should have been received as the books of Moses, in that age wherein they may have been supposed to have been first invented. Why? Because they speak of themselves as delivered by Moses, and kept in the ark from his time. "And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book until they were finished; that Moses commanded the Levites, who bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee, Deut. xxxi. 24—26. And there was a copy of this book to be left likewise with the king. And it shall be when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law, and these statutes to do them," Deuteronomy xvii. 18, 19.

Here, you see that this book of the law, speaks of itself, not only as a history or relation of what things were then done: but as the standing and municipal law and statutes of the nation of the Jews, binding the king as well as the people.

Now, in whatever age after Moses you will suppose this book to have been forged, it was impossible it could be received as truth; because it was not then to be found, either in the ark, or with the king, or anywhere else: for when first invented, every body must know, that they had never heard of it before.

And therefore they could less believe it to be the book of their statutes, and the standing law of the land, which they had all along received, and by which they had been governed.

Could any man, now at this day, invent a book of statutes or acts of parliament for England, and make it pass upon the nation as the only book of statutes that ever they had known? As impossible was it for the books of Moses (if they were invented in any age after Moses) to have been received for what they declared themselves to be, viz. the

statutes and municipal law of the nation of the Jews: and to have persuaded the Jews, that they had owned and acknowledged these books, all along from the days of Moses, to that day in which they were first invented, that is, that they had owned them before they had ever so much as heard of them. Nay, more, the whole nation must in an instant forget their former laws and government, if they could receive these books as their former laws. And they could not otherwise receive them, because they vouched themselves so to be. Let me ask the deist but this one short question, Was there ever a book of sham laws, which were not the laws of the nation, palmed upon any people, since the world began? If not, with what face can they say this, of the book of laws of the Jews? Why will they say that of them, which they confess impossible in any nation, or among any people?

But they must be yet more unreasonable. For the books of Moses have a farther demonstration of their truth, than even other law books have; for they not only contain the laws, but give an historical account of their institution, and the practice of them from that time: as of the passover, Numbers viii. 17, 18, in memory of the death of the first-born in Egypt: and that the same day, all the first-born of Israel both of man and beast, were by a perpetual law, dedicated to God: and the Levites taken for all the first-born of the children of Israel. That Aaron's rod which budded, was kept in the ark, in memory of the rebellion and wonderful destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and for the confirmation of the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. As likewise the pot of manna, in memory of their having been fed with it forty years in the wilderness. That the brazen serpent was kept (which remained to the days of Hezekiah, 2 Kings xviii. 4,) in memory of that wonderful deliverance, by only looking upon it, from the biting of the fiery serpents, Num. xxi. 9. The feast of pentecost, in memory of the dreadful appearance of God upon Mount Horeb, &c.

And, besides these remembrances of particular actions and occurrences, there were other solemn institutions in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt in the general, which included all the particulars, as of the Sabbath, Deut. v. 15. Their daily sacrifices, and yearly expiations, their new moons, and several feasts and fasts. So that there were yearly, monthly, weekly, daily remembrances, and recognitions of these things.

And not only so, but the books of the same Moses tell us, that a particular tribe [of Levi] was appointed and consecrated by God as his priests; by whose hands and none other, the sacrifices of the people were to be offered, and these solemn institutions to be celebrated. That it was death for any other to approach the altar. That their high priest wore a glorious mitre, and magnificent robes of God's own contrivance, with the miraculous Urim and Thummim in his breast-plate, whence the divine responses were given. That at his word the king and all the people were to go out, and to come in, Num. xxvii. 21. That these Levites were likewise the chief judges, even in all civil causes, and that it was death to resist their sentence, Deut. xvii. 8—13; 1 Chron. xxiii. 4. Now whenever it can be supposed that these books of Moses were forged, in some ages after Moses, it is impossible they could have been received as true, unless the forgers could have made the whole nation believe, that they had received these books from their fathers, had been instruct-

ed in them when they were children, and had taught them to their children; moreover, that they had all been circumcised, and did circumcise their children, in pursuance to what was commanded in these books: that they had observed the yearly passover, the weekly Sabbath, the new moons, and all these several feasts, fasts, and ceremonies, commanded in these books: that they had never eaten any swine's flesh, or other meats prohibited in these books; that they had a magnificent tabernacle, with a visible priesthood to administer in it, which was confined to the tribe of Levi; over whom was placed a glorious high priest, clothed with great and mighty prerogative, whose death only could deliver those that were fled to the cities of refuge. And that these priests were their ordinary judges, even in civil matters, Num. xxxv. 25, 28. I say, was it possible to have persuaded a whole nation of men, that they had known and practised all these things, if they had not done it? Or, secondly, to have received a book for truth, which said they had practised them, and appealed to that practice; so that here are the third and fourth of the marks above mentioned.

But now let us descend to the utmost degree of supposition, viz. that these things were practised, before these books of Moses were forged; and that these books did only impose upon the nation, in making them believe, that they had kept these observances in memory of such and such things, as were inserted in these books.

Well then let us proceed upon this supposition, (however groundless,) and now, will not the same impossibilities occur, as in the former case? For first, this must suppose that the Jews kept all these observances in memory of nothing, or without knowing any thing of their original, or the reason why they kept them. Whereas these very observances did express the ground and reason of their being kept, as the passover, in memory of God's passing over the children of the Israelites, in that night wherein he slew all the first-born of Egypt, and so of the rest.

But secondly, let us suppose, contrary both to reason and matter of fact, that the Jews did not know any reason at all why they kept these observances: yet was it possible to put it upon them, that they had kept these observances in memory of what they had never heard of before that day, whensoever you will suppose that these books of Moses were first forged? For example, suppose I should now forge some romantic story of strange things done a thousand years ago, and in confirmation of this, should endeavor to persuade the Christian world, that they had all along, from that day to this, kept the first day of the week in memory of such a hero, an Apollonius, a Barcosbas, or a Mohammed; and had all been baptised in his name; and swore by his name, and upon that very book, (which I had then forged, and which they never saw before,) in their public judicatures; that this book was their Gospel and law, which they had ever since that time, these thousand years past, universally received and owned, and none other. I would ask any deist, whether he thinks it possible, that such a cheat could pass, or such a legend be received as the Gospel of Christians; and that they could be made to believe, that they never had any other Gospel? The same reason is as to the books of Moses, and must be, as to every matter of fact, which has all the four marks before mentioned; and these marks secure any such matter of fact as much from being invented and imposed in any after ages, as at the time when such matters of fact were said to be done.

Let me give one very familiar example more in this case. There is the Stonehenge in Salisbury Plain, every body knows it ; and yet none knows the reason why those great stones were set there, or by whom, or in memory of what.

Now suppose I should write a book to-morrow, and tell there that these stones were set up by Hercules, Polyphemus, or Garagantua, in memory of such and such of their actions. And for a farther confirmation of this, should say, in this book, that it was wrote at the time when such actions were done, and by the very actors themselves, or eye-witnesses. And that this book had been received as truth, and quoted by authors of the greatest reputation in all ages since. Moreover, that this book was well known in England, and enjoined by act of parliament to be taught our children, and that we did teach it to our children, and had been taught it ourselves when we were children. I ask any deist whether he thinks this could pass upon England ? And whether, if I, or any other should insist upon it, we should not, instead of being believed, be sent to Bedlam ?

Now let us compare this with the Stonehenge, as I may call it, or twelve great stones set up at Gilgal, which is told in the fourth chapter of Joshua. It is there said, verso 6, that the reason why they were set up, was, that when their children in after ages, should ask the meaning of it, it should be told them.

And the thing in memory of which they were set up, was such as could not possibly be imposed upon that nation, at that time, when it was said to be done : it was as wonderful and miraculous as their passage through the Red sea.

And withal, free from a very poor objection, which the deists have advanced against that miracle of the Red sea : thinking to solve it by a spring tide, with the concurrence of a strong wind, happening at the same time, which left the sand so dry, as that the Israelites being all foot, might pass through the oozy places and holes, which it must be supposed the sea left behind it : but that the Egyptians being all horse and chariots, stuck in those holes and were entangled, so as that they could not march so fast as the Israelites : and that this was all the meaning of its being said, that God took off their [the Egyptians] chariot wheels, that they drove them heavily. So that they would make nothing extraordinary, at least, not miraculous in all this action.

This is advanced in Le Clerc's Dissertations upon Genesis, lately printed in Holland, and that part with others of the like tendency, endeavoring to resolve other miracles, as that of Sodom and Gomorrah, &c. into the mere natural causes, are put into English by the well known T. Brown, for the edification of the deists in England.

But these gentlemen have forgotten, that the Israelites had great herds of many thousand cattle with them ; which would be apter to stray, and fall into those holes, and oozy places in the sand, than horses with riders who might direct them.

But such precarious and silly supposes are not worth the answering. If there had been no more in this passage through the Red sea, than that of a spring tide, &c. it had been impossible for Moses to have made the Israelites believe the relation given of it in Exodus, with so many particulars, which themselves saw to be true.

And all those Scriptures which magnify this action, and appeal to it

as a full demonstration of the miraculous power of God, must be reputed as romance or legend.

I say this for the sake of some Christians, who think it no prejudice to the truth of the Holy Bible, but rather as an advantage, as rendering it more easy to be believed, if they can solve whatever seems miraculous in it, by the power of second causes; and so to make all, as they speak, natural and easy. Wherein if they could prevail, the natural and easy result would be, not to believe one word in all those sacred oracles. For, if things be not as they are told in any relation, that relation must be false. And if false in part, we cannot trust to it, either in whole or in part.

Here are to be excepted, mistranslations, and errors, either in copy or in press. But where there is no room for supposing of these, as where all copies do agree; there we must either receive all, or reject all. I mean in any book that pretends to be written from the mouth of God. For in other common histories, we may believe part and reject part, as we see cause.

But to return. The passage of the Israelites over Jordan, in memory of which these stones at Gilgal were set up, is free from all those little carpings before mentioned, that are made as to the passage through the Red sea. For notice was given to the Israelites the day before of this great miracle to be done, Josh. iii, 5. It was done at noon day, before the whole nation. And when the waters of Jordan were divided, it was not at any low ebb, but at the time when that river overflowed all its banks, verse 15. And it was done, not by winds, or in length of time, which winds must take to do it; but all on the sudden, as soon as the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, then the waters which came down from above, stood and rose up upon a heap, very far from the city of Adam, that is besides Zaretan: and those that came down towards the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over, right against Jericho. The priests stood in the midst of Jordan, till all the armies of Israel had passed over. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, were come up, out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lift up upon the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks as they did before. And the people came up out of Jordan, on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, when your children shall ask their fathers, in time to come, saying, what mean these stones? Then shall ye let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over; as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over. That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God forever; chapter iv. from verse 18.

If the passage of the Red sea had been only taking advantage of a spring tide, or the like, how would this teach all the people of the earth that the hand of the Lord was mighty? How would a thing no more

remarkable, have been taken notice of through all the world? How would it have taught Israel to fear the Lord, when they must know, that notwithstanding all of these big words, there was so little in it? How could they have believed, or received a book, as truth, which they knew, told the matter so far otherwise from what it was?

But, as I said, this passage over Jordan, which is here compared to that of the Red sea, is free from those cavils that are made as to that of the Red sea, and is a farther attestation to it, being said to be done in the same manner as was that of the Red sea.

Now, to form our argument, let us suppose, that there never was any such thing as that passage over Jordan. That these stones at Gilgal were set up upon some other occasion, in some after age. And then that some designing man invented this book of Joshua, and said, that it was written by Joshua, at that time. And gave this stonage at Gilgal for a testimony of the truth of it. Would not every body say to him, we know the stonage at Gilgal; but we never heard before of this reason for it? Nor of this book of Joshua? Where has it been all this while? And where and how came you, after so many ages to find it? Besides, this book tells us, that this passage over Jordan was ordained to be taught our children, from age to age; and therefore, that they were always to be instructed in the meaning of that stonage at Gilgal as a memorial of it. But we were never taught it when we were children; nor did ever teach our children any such thing. And it is not likely that it could have been forgotten, while so remarkable a stonage did continue, which was set up for that, and no other end!

And if, for the reason before given, no such imposition could be put upon us, as to the stonage at Salisbury Plain: how much less could it be as to the stonage at Gilgal!

And if where we know not the reason of a bare naked monument, such a sham reason cannot be imposed: how much more is it impossible to impose upon us, in actions and observances, which we celebrate in memory of particular passages! How impossible to make us forget those passages which we daily commemorate; and persuade us, that we had always kept such institutions in memory of what we never heard of before; that is, that we knew it, before we knew it.

And if we find it thus impossible for an imposition to be put upon us, even in some things, which have not all the four marks before mentioned; how much more impossible is it, that any deceit should be in that thing, where all the four marks do meet!

This has been shown in the first place, as to the matters of fact of Moses.

Therefore I come now, secondly, to show, that, as, in the matters of fact of Moses, so likewise, all these four marks do meet in the matters of fact, which are recorded in the Gospel of our blessed Saviour. And my work herein will be the shorter, because all that is said before, of Moses and his books, is every way as applicable to Christ and his Gospel. His works and miracles are there said to be done publicly, in the face of the world, as he argued to his accusers, "I spake openly to the world, and in secret have I said nothing," John xviii. 20. It is told, Acts ii. 41, that three thousand at one time; chap. iv. 4, that above five thousand at another time, were converted, upon conviction of what themselves had seen, what had been done publicly before their eyes,

wherein it was impossible to have imposed upon them. Therefore here were the two first of the rules before mentioned.

Then for the two second: baptism and the Lord's supper were instituted as perpetual memorials of these things; and they were not instituted in after ages, but at the very time when these things were said to be done; and have been observed without interruption, in all ages through the whole Christian world, down all the way from that time to this. And Christ himself did ordain apostles, and other ministers of his Gospel, to preach, and administer these sacraments; and to govern his church; and that "always, even unto the end of the world," Matt. xxviii, 20. Accordingly they have continued by regular succession to this day; and, no doubt, ever shall, while the earth shall last. So that the Christian clergy are as notorious a matter of fact, as the tribe of Levi among the Jews. And the Gospel is as much a law to the Christians, as the book of Moses to the Jews. And it being part of the matter of fact related in the Gospel, that such an order of men were appointed by Christ, and to continue to the end of the world; consequently, if the Gospel was a fiction, and invented (as it must be) in some ages after Christ; then, at that time, when it was first invented, there could be no such order of clergy, as derived themselves from the institution of Christ; which must give the lie to the Gospel, and demonstrate the whole to be false. And the matters of fact of Christ being pressed to be true, no otherwise than as there was, at that time (whenever the deists will suppose the Gospel to be forged) not only public sacraments of Christ's institution, but an order of clergy, likewise of his appointment to administer them: and it being impossible there could be any such things before they were invented, it is as impossible that they should be received when invented. And therefore, by what was said above, it was as impossible to have imposed upon mankind in this matter, by inventing of it in after ages, as at the time when those things were said to be done.

The matters of fact of Mohammed, or what is fabled of the deities, do all want some of the aforesaid four rules, whereby the certainty of matters of fact is demonstrated. First, Mohammed pretended to no miracles, as he tells us in his Alcoran, c. 6, &c. and those which are commonly told of him pass among the Mohammedans themselves but as legendary fables; and, as such, are rejected by the wise and learned among them; as the legends of their saints are in the church of Rome. See Dr. Prideaux's life of Mohammed, page 34.

But, in the next place, those which are told of him, do all want the two first rules before mentioned. For his pretended converse with the moon; his Mersa, or night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and thence to heaven, &c. were not performed before any body. We have only his own word for them. And they are as groundless as the delusions of Fox, or Muggleton, among ourselves. The same is to be said (in the second place) of the fables of the heathen gods, of Mercury's stealing sheep, Jupitour's turning himself into a bull, and the like; besides the folly and unworthiness of such senseless pretended miracles. And moreover, the wise among the heathen did reckon no otherwise of these but as fables, which had a mythology, or mystical meaning in them, of which several of them have given us the rationale, or explication. And it is plain enough that Ovid meant no other by all his Metamorphoses.

It is true, the heathen deities had their priests: they had likewise feasts, games, and other public institutions in memory of them. But all these want the fourth mark, viz. that such priesthood and institutions should commence from the time that such things as they commemorate were said to be done; otherwise they cannot secure after ages from imposture, by detecting it, at the time when first invented, as hath been argued before. But the Bacchanalia, and other heathen feasts, were instituted many ages after what was reported of these gods was said to be done, and therefore can be no proof of them. And the priests of Bacchus, Apollo, &c., were not ordained by these supposed gods: but were appointed by others, in after ages, only in honor to them. And therefore these orders of priests are no evidence to the truth of the matters of fact, which are reported of their gods.

III. Now, to apply what has been said, you may challenge all the deists in the world to show any action that is fabulous, which has all the four rules, or marks before mentioned. No, it is impossible. And (to resume a little what is spoken to before) the histories of Exodus and the Gospel could never have been received, if they had not been true; because the institution of the priesthood of Levi, and of Christ: of the sabbath, the passover, of circumcision, of baptism, and the Lord's supper, &c., are there related, as descending all the way down from those times without interruption. And it is full as impossible to persuade men, that they had been circumcised, baptized, had circumcised or baptized their children, celebrated passovers, sabbaths, sacraments, &c., under the government, and administration of a certain order of priests, if they had done none of these things, as to make them believe that they had gone through sea upon dry land, seen the dead raised, &c. And without believing of these, it was impossible that either the law, or the Gospel, could have been received.

And the truth of the matters of fact of Exodus and the Gospel, being no otherwise pressed upon men than as they have practised such public institutions; it is appealing to the senses of mankind for the truth of them; and makes it impossible for any to have invented such stories in after ages, without a palpable detection of the cheat, when first invented; as impossible as to have imposed upon the senses of mankind at the time when such public matters of fact were said to be done.

IV. I do not say, that every thing which wants these four marks is false: but, that nothing can be false which has them all.

I have no manner of doubt, that there was such a man as Julius Cæsar; that he fought at Pharsalia, was killed in the senate-house; and many other matters of fact of ancient times, though we keep no public observances in memory of them.

But this shows that the matters of fact of Moses and Christ, have come down to us better guarded than any other matters of fact how true never.

And yet our deists, who would laugh any man out of the world, as an irrational brute, that should offer to deny Cæsar or Alexander, Homer or Virgil, their public works and actions, do, at the same time, value themselves as the only men of wit and sense, of free, generous, and unbiased judgments, for ridiculing the histories of Moses and Christ, that are infinitely better attested, and guarded with infallible marks, which the others want.

V, Besides that, the importance of the subject would oblige all men to inquire more narrowly into the one than the other : for what consequence it is to me, or to the world, whether there was such a man as Cæsar ; whether he beat, or was beaten at Pharsalia ; whether Homer or Virgil wrote such books ; and whether what is related in the *Iliads* or *Æniads* be true or false ? It was not two pence up or down to any man in the world. And therefore it is worth no man's while to inquire into it, either to oppose or justify the truth of these relations.

But our very souls and bodies, both this life and eternity, are concerned in the truth of what is related in the Holy Scriptures ; and therefore men would be more inquisitive to search into the truth of these, than of any other matters of fact ; examine and sift them narrowly : and find out the deceit, if any such could be found : for it concerned them nearly, and was of the last importance to them.

How unreasonable then it is to reject these matters of fact so sifted, so examined, and so attested as no other matters of fact in the world ever were ; and yet to think it the most highly unreasonable, even to madness, to deny other matters of fact, which have not the thousandth part of their evidence, and are of no consequence at all to us, whether true or false !

VI. There are several other topics, from whence the truth of the Christian religion is evinced to all who judge by reason, and give themselves leave to consider. As the improbability that ten or twelve poor illiterate fishermen should form a design of converting the whole world to believe their delusions ; and the impossibility of their affecting it, without force of arms, learning, oratory, or any one visible thing that could recommend them ! and to impose a doctrine quite opposite to the lusts and pleasures of men, and all worldly advantages, or enjoyments ! And this in an age of so great learning and sagacity, as that wherein the Gospel was first preached ! That these apostles should not only undergo all the scorn and contempt, but the severest persecutions, and most cruel deaths that could be inflicted, in attestation to what themselves know to be a mere deceit and forgery of their own contriving ! Some have suffered for errors which they thought to be truth ; but never any for what themselves knew to be lies. And the apostles must know what they taught to be lies, if it was so, because they spoke of those things which they said they had both seen and heard, had looked upon, and handled with their hands, &c., Acts iv. 20 ; 1 John i. 1.

Neither can it be said that they, perhaps, might have proposed some temporal advantages to themselves, but missed of them, and met with sufferings instead of them : for, if it had been so, it is more probable, that when they saw their disappointment, they would have discovered their conspiracy ; especially when they might not only have saved their lives, but got great rewards for doing it ; than that no one of them should ever have been brought to do this.

But this is not all ; for they tell us that their Master bid them expect nothing but sufferings in this world. This is the tenure of all that Gospel which they taught. And they told the same to all whom they converted. So that here was no disappointment.

For, all that were converted by them, were converted upon the certain expectation of sufferings, and bidden prepare for it. Christ commanded his disciples to take up their cross daily and follow him ; and told them,

that in the world they should have tribulation; that whoever did not forsake father, mother, wife, children, lands, and their very lives, could not be his disciples; that he, who sought to save his life in this world, should lose it in the next.

Now, that this despised doctrine of the cross should prevail so universally against the allurements of flesh and blood, and all the blandishments of this world: against the rage and persecution of all the kings and powers of the earth, must show its original to be Divine, and its protector Almighty. What is it else, could conquer without arms, persuade without rhetoric, overcome enemies, disarm tyrants, and subdue empires without opposition!

VII. We may add to all this, the testimonies of the most bitter enemies and persecutors of Christianity, both Jews and Gentiles, to the truth of the matter of fact of Christ, such as Josephus and Tacitus; of which the first flourished about forty years after the death of Christ, and the other about seventy years after: so that they were capable of examining into the truth, and wanted not prejudice and malice sufficient to have inclined them to deny the matter of fact itself of Christ: but their confessing to it, as likewise Lucian, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian the apostate; the Mohammedans since, and all other enemies of Christianity that have arisen in the world, is an undeniable attestation to the truth of the matter of fact.

VIII. But there is another argument more strong and convincing than even this matter of fact; more than the certainty of what I see with my eyes: and which the apostle Peter called a more sure word, that is, proof, that what he saw and heard upon the holy mount, when our blessed Saviour was transfigured before him and two other of the apostles: for, having repeated that passage as a proof of that whereof they were eye-witnesses, and heard the voice from heaven giving attestation to our Lord Christ, 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18. He says, ver. 19, we have also a more sure word of prophecy for the proof of this Jesus being the Messiah, that is, the prophecies which had gone before of him, from the beginning of the world; and all exactly fulfilled in him.

Men may dispute an imposition or delusion upon our outward senses; but how can that be false that has been so long, even from the beginning of the world, and so often by all the prophets, in several ages foretold; now can this be an imposition, or a forgery?

This is particularly insisted on in the "Method with the Jews" and even the deists must confess, that the book we call the Old Testament was in the hands of the Jews long before our Saviour came into the world. And if they will be at the pains to compare the prophecies that are there of the Messiah, with the fulfilling of them, as to time, place, and all other circumstances, in the person, birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our blessed Saviour, will find this proof what our apostles here call it, a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts; which God grant. Here is no possibility of deceit or imposture.

Old prophecies, (and all these so agreeing) could not have been contrived to countenance a new cheat: and nothing could be a cheat that could fulfill all these.

For this, therefore, I refer the deists, to the "Method with the Jews." I desire them likewise to look there, sect. xi. and consider the pro-

phesies given so long ago, of which they see the fulfilling at this day, with their own eyes, of the state of the Jews, for many ages past, and at present; without a king, or priest, or temple, or sacrifice, scattered to the four winds, sifted as with a sieve, among all nations; yet so preserved, and always to be, a distinct people from all others of the whole earth. Whereas those mighty monarchies which oppressed the Jews, and which commanded the world in their turns; and had the greatest human prospect of perpetuity, were to be extinguished as they have been, even that their names should be blotted out from under heaven.

As likewise, that as remarkable of our blessed Saviour, concerning the preservation and progress of the Christian church, when in her swaddling clothes, consisting only of a few poor fishermen. Not by the sword, as that of Mohammed, but under all the persecution of men and hell; which yet should not prevail against her.

But though I offer these, as not to be slighted by the deists, to which they can show nothing equal in all profane history: and in which it is impossible any cheat can lie; yet I put them not upon the same foot as the prophecies before mentioned of the marks and coming of the Messiah, which have been since the world began.

And that general expectation of the whole earth, at the time of his coming, insisted upon in the "Method with the Jews," sect. v. is greatly to be noticed.

But, I say, the foregoing prophecies of our Saviour, are so strong a proof, as even miracles would not be sufficient to break their authority.

I mean, if it were possible that a true miracle could be wrought in contradiction to them. For that would be for God to contradict himself.

But no sign or wonder, that could possibly be solved, should shake this evidence.

It is this that keeps the Jews in their obstinacy. Though they cannot deny the matters of fact done by our blessed Saviour, to be truly miracles, if so done as said. Nor can they deny that they were so done, because they have all the four marks before mentioned. Yet they cannot yield! Why? Because they think that the Gospel is in contradiction to the law. Which, if it were, the consequence would be unavoidable, that both could not be true. To solve this, is the business of the "Method of the Jews." But the contradiction, which they suppose, is in their comments that they put upon the law; especially they expect a literal fulfilling of those promises of the restoration of Jerusalem, and outward glories of the church, of which there is so frequent mention in the books of Moses, the Psalms, and all the prophets. And many Christians do expect the same; and take those texts as literally as the Jews do. We do believe and pray for the conversion of the Jews. For this end they have been so miraculously preserved, according to the prophecies so long before of it. And when that time shall come, as they are most honorable and ancient of all the nations on the earth, so will their church return to be the mother Christian church, as she was at first; and Rome must surrender to Jerusalem. Then all nations will flow thither. And even Ezekiel's temple may be literally built there, in the metropolis of the whole earth; which Jerusalem must be, when the fullness of the Gentiles, shall meet with the conversion of the Jews. For no nation will contend with the Jews, nor church with Jerusalem for supremacy. All nations will be ambitious to draw their

original from the Jews, whose are the the fathers, and from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came.

Then will be fulfilled that outward grandeur and restoration of the Jews and of Jerusalem, which they expect, pursuant to the prophecies.

They pretend not that this is limited to any particular time of the sign of the Messiah. They are sure it will not be at the beginning; or they expect to go through great conflicts and trials with their Messiah (as the Christian church has done) before his final conquest, and that they come to reign with him. So that this is no obstruction to their embracing of Christianity. They see the same things fulfilled in us, which they expect themselves; and we expect the same things they do.

I tell this to the deists, lest they may think that the Jews have some stronger arguments than they know of; that they are not persuaded by the miracles of our blessed Saviour, and by the fulfilling of all the prophecies in him, that were made concerning the Messiah.

As I said before, I would not plead even miracles against these.

And if this is sufficient to persuade a Jew, it is much more so to a deist, who labors not under these objections.

Besides I would not seem to clash with that (in a sound sense) reasonable caution, used by Christian writers, not to put the issue of the truth wholly upon miracles, without this addition, when not done in contradiction to the revelations already given in the holy Scriptures.

And they do it upon this consideration, though it is impossible to suppose that God would work a real miracle, in contradiction to what he has already revealed; yet men may be imposed upon by false and seeming miracles, and pretended revelations, (as there are many examples, especially in the church of Rome,) and so may be shaken in the faith, if they keep not to the holy Scriptures as their rule.

We are told, 2 Thess. xi. 9, of him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders. And Rev. xiii. 14, xvi. 14, and xix. 20, of the devil and false prophets, working miracles. But the word, in all these places, is only *semeia*, *signs*, that is, as it is rendered, Mat. xxv. 24, which though sometimes it may be used to signify real miracles, yet not always, nor in these places. For though every miracle be a sign and a wonder, yet every sign or wonder is not a miracle.

IX. Here it may be proper to consider a common topic of the deists, who, when they are not able to stand out against the evidence of fact, that such and such miracles have been done; then turn about and deny such things to be miracles, at least, that we can never be sure whether any wonderful thing that is shown to us be a true or a false miracle.

And the great argument they go upon is this, that a miracle being that which exceeds the power of nature, we cannot know what exceeds it, unless we know the utmost extent of the power of nature: and no man pretends to know that; therefore, that no man can certainly know whether any event be miraculous. And, consequently, he may be cheated in his judgment between true and false miracles.

To which I answer, that men may be so cheated, and there are many examples of it.

But that though we may not always know when we are cheated, yet we can certainly tell, in many cases, when we are not cheated.

For though we do not know the utmost extent of the power of nature, perhaps, in any one thing ; yet it does not follow, that we know not the nature of any thing, in some measure ; and that certainly too. For example ; though I do not know the utmost extent of the power of fire, yet I certainly know, that it is the nature of fire to burn ; and that when proper fuel is administered to it, it is contrary to the nature of fire not to consume it. Therefore, if I see three men taken off the street, in their common wearing apparel, and without any preparation cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace ; and that the flame was so fierce, that it burnt up those men that threw them in ; and yet that those who were thrown, should walk up and down in the bottom of the furnace, and I should see a fourth person with them of glorious appearance like the Son of God ; and that these men should come up again out of the furnace without any harm, or so much as the smell of fire upon themselves, or their clothes, I could not be deceived in thinking that there was a stop put to the nature of fire, as to these men ; and that it had its effect upon the men whom it burnt at the same time.

Again, though I cannot tell how wonderful and sudden an increase of corn might be produced by the concurrence of many causes, as a warm climate, the fertility of the soil, &c. ; yet this I can certainly know, that there is not that natural force in the breath of two or three words spoken to multiply one small loaf of bread so fast, in the breaking of it, as truly and really, not only in appearance and show to the eye, but to fill the bellies of several thousand hungry persons ; and that the fragments should be much more than the bread was at first.

So neither in a word spoken, to raise the dead, cure diseases, &c.

Therefore, though we know not the utmost extent of the power of nature ; yet we can certainly know what is contrary to the nature of several such things as we do know.

And therefore, though we may be cheated and imposed upon in many seeming miracles and wonders, yet there are some things wherein we may be certain.

But farther, the deists acknowledge a God, of an almighty power, who made all things ; yet they would put it out of his power to make any revelation of his will to mankind. For if we cannot be certain of any miracle, how should we know when God sent any thing extraordinary to us ?

Nay, how should we know the ordinary power of nature, if we know not what exceeded it ? If we know not what is natural, how do we know there is such a thing as nature ? That all is not supernatural, all miracles, and so disputable, till we come to downright scepticism, and doubt the certainty of our outward senses, whether we see, hear, or feel ; or all be not a miraculous illusion !

Which, because I know the deists are not inclined to do, therefore I will return to pursue my argument upon the conviction of our outward senses, desiring only this, that they would allow the senses of other men to be as certain as their own. Which they cannot refuse, since without this, they can have no certainty of their own.

X. Therefore, from what has been said, the cause is summed up shortly in this, that though we cannot see what was done before our time, yet by the marks which I have laid down concerning the certainty of matters of fact done before our time, we may be as much assured of the

truth of them, as if we saw them with our eyes ; because whatever matter of fact has all the four marks before mentioned, could never have been invented and received, but upon the conviction of the outward senses of all those who did receive it, as before is demonstrated. And therefore the topic which I have chosen does stand upon the conviction even of men's outward senses. And since you have confined me to one topic, I have not insisted upon the other, which I have only named.

XI. And it now lies upon the deists, if they would appear as men of reason, to show some matters of fact of former ages, which they allow to be true, that has greater evidence of its truth, than the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ : otherwise they cannot, with any show of reason, reject the one, and yet admit of the other.

But I have given them greater latitude than this ; for I have shown such marks of the truth of the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ, as no other matters of fact of those times, however true, have but these only : and I put it upon them to show any forgery that has all these marks.

This is a short issue. Keep them close to this. This determines the cause all at once.

Let them produce their Apollonius Tyanæus, whose life was put into English by the execrable Charles Blount* and compared with all the wit and malice he was master of, to the life and miracles of our blessed Saviour. Let them take aid from all the legends of the Church of Rome, those pious cheats, the sorest disgraces in Christianity ; and which have bid the fairest of any one contrivance to overturn the certainty of the miracles of Christ, and his apostles, and the whole truth of the Gospel, by putting them all upon the same foot ; at least, they are so understood by the generality of their devotees, though disowned and laughed at by the learned, and men of sense among them.

Let them pick and choose the most probable of all the fables of the heathen deities, and see if they can find in any of these, the four marks before mentioned.

Otherwise let them submit to the irrefragable certainty of the Christian religion.

XII. But if, notwithstanding all that is said, the deists will still contend, that all this is but priestcraft, the invention of priests, for their own profit, &c., then they will give us an idea of priests, far different from what they intend ; for then, we must look upon these priests, not only as the cunningest and wisest of mankind, but we shall be tempted to adore them as deities, who have such power, as to impose, at their pleasure, upon the senses of mankind, to make them believe, that they had practised such public institutions, enacted them by laws, taught them to their children, &c., when they had never done any of these things, or

* The hand of that scorner, which durst write such outrageous blasphemy against his Maker, the Divine vengeance has made his own executioner. This I would not have mentioned, (because the like judgment has befallen others,) but that the *Theistical Club* have set this up as a principle ; and printed a vindication of this same Blount for murdering himself, by way of justification for self-murder. Which some of them have since, as well as formerly, horribly practised upon themselves. Therefore this is no common judgment to which they are delivered, but a visible mark set upon them, to show how far God has forsaken them ; and as a caution to all Christians to beware of them, and not to come near the tents of these wicked men, lest they perish in their destruction, both of soul and body.

even so much as heard of them before : and then, upon the credit of their believing that they had done such things as they never did, to make them farther believe, upon the same foundation, whatever they pleased to impose upon them, as to former ages : I say, such a power as this, must exceed all that is human ; and consequently, make us rank these priests far above the condition of mortals.

2. Nay, this were to make them outdo all that has ever been related of the infernal powers ; for though their legerdemain had extended to deceive some unwary beholders ; and their power of working some seeming miracles has been great, yet it never reached, or ever was supposed to reach so far, as to deceive the senses of all mankind in matters of such public and notorious nature as those of which we now speak, to make them believe, that they had enacted laws for such public observances, continually practised them, taught them to their children, and had been instructed in them themselves from their childhood, if they had never enacted, practised, taught, or been taught such things.

3. And as this exceeds all the power of hell and devils, so is it more than ever God Almighty has done since the foundation of the world. None of the miracles that he has shown, or belief which he has required to any thing that he has revealed, has ever contradicted the outward senses of any one man in the world, much less of all mankind together. For miracles being appeals to our outward senses, if they should overthrow the certainty of our outward senses, must destroy, with it, all their own certainty as to us ; since we have no other way to judge of a miracle exhibited to our senses, than upon the supposition of the certainty of our senses, upon which we give credit to a miracle that is shown to our senses.

4. This, by the way, is a yet unanswered argument against the miracle of transubstantiation, and shows the weakness of the defence which the church of Rome offers for it, (from whom the Socinians have licked it up, and of late, have gloried much in it among us,) that the doctrines of the trinity or incarnation contain as great seeming absurdities as that of transubstantiation. For I would ask, which of our senses it is which the doctrines of the trinity or incarnation do contradict ? Is it our seeing, hearing, feeling, taste, or smell ? whereas transubstantiation does contradict all of these. Therefore the comparison is exceeding short, and out of purpose. But to return.

If the Christian religion be a cheat, and nothing else but the invention of priests, and carried on by their craft, it makes their power and wisdom greater than that of men, angels, or devils ; and more than God himself ever yet showed or expressed, to deceive and impose upon the senses of mankind, in such public and notorious matters of fact.

XIII. And this miracle, which the deists must run into to avoid these recorded of Moses and Christ, is much greater, and more astonishing, than all the Scriptures tell of them.

So that these men who laugh at all miracles, are now obliged to account for the greatest of all, how the senses of mankind could be imposed upon in such public matters of fact.

And how then can they make the priests the most contemptible of all mankind, since they make them the sole authors of this the greatest of miracles ?

XIV. And since the deists (these men of sense and reason) have so

idle and mean an idea of the priests of all religions, why do they not recover the world out of the possession and government of such blockheads? Why do they suffer kings and states to be led by them; to establish their deceits by laws, and inflict penalties upon the opposers of them? Let the deists try their hands; they have been trying, and are now busy about it. And free liberty they have. Yet they have not prevailed, nor even ever yet did prevail in any civilized or generous nation. And though they have made some inroads among the Hottentots, and some other the most brutal part of mankind, yet are they still exploded, and priests live and do prevail against them, among not only the greatest, but best part of the world, and the most glorious for arts, learning and war.

XV. For as the devil does ape God, in his institutions of religion, his arts and sacrifices, &c., so likewise in his priests, without whom, no religion, whether true or false, can stand. False religion is but a corruption of the true. The true was before it, though it be followed close upon the heels.

The revelation made to Moses is older than any history extant in the heathen world. The heathens, in imitation of him, pretended likewise to their revelations; but I have given those marks which distinguish them from the true: none of them have those four marks before mentioned.

Now the deists think all revelations to be equally pretended and a cheat; and the priests of all religions to be the same contrivers and jugglers; and therefore they proclaim war equally against all, and are equally engaged to bear the brunt of all.

And if the contest be only between the deists and the priests, which of them are the men of the greatest parts and sense, let the effects determine it; and let the deists yield the victory to their conquerors, who by their own confession carry all the world before them.

XVI. If the deists say, that this is because all the world are blockheads, as well as those priests who govern them; that all are blockheads except the deists, who vote themselves only to be men of sense: this besides the modesty of it) will spoil their great and beloved topic, in half of what they call natural religion, against the revealed, viz. appealing to the common reason of mankind. This they set up against revelation; think this to be sufficient for all the uses of men, here or hereafter, (if there be any after state,) and therefore that there is no use of revelation; this common reason they advance as infallible, at least, as the surest guide, yet now cry out upon it, when it turns against them; when this common reason runs after revelation, (as it always has done,) then common reason is a beast, and we must look for reason, not from the common sentiments of mankind, but only among the beaux, the deists.

XVII. Therefore if the deists would avoid the mortification (which would be very uneasy to them) to yield and submit to be subdued and bowed down before the priests, whom of all mankind they hate and despise; if they would avoid this, let them confess as the truth is, That religion is no invention of priests, but of Divine original: that priests are instituted by the same author of religion; and that their order is a perpetual and living monument of the matters of fact of their religion, instituted from the time that such matters of fact were said to be done, the Levites from Moses; the apostles, and succeeding clergy, from Christ, to this day. That no heathen priests can say the same: they

were not appointed by the gods whom they served, but by others in after ages : they cannot stand the test of the four rules before mentioned, which the Christian priests can do, and they only. Now the Christian priesthood, as instituted by Christ himself, and continued by succession to this day, being as impregnable and flagrant a testimony to the truth of the matters of fact of Christ, as the sacraments, or any other public institutions : besides that, if the priesthood were taken away, the sacraments, and other public institutions, which are administered by their hands, must fall with them : therefore the devil has been most busy, and bent his greatest force, in all ages, against the priesthood, knowing, that if that goes down, all goes with it.

XVIII. And now, last of all, if one word of advice would not be lost upon men who think so unmeasurably of themselves, as the deists, you may represent to them, what a common condition they are in, who spend that life and sense, which God has given them, in ridiculing the greatest of his blessings, his revelations of Christ, and by Christ, to redeem those from eternal misery, who shall believe in him and obey his laws. And that God, in his wonderful mercy and wisdom, has so guarded his revelations, as that it is past the power of men or devils to counterfeit ; and that there is no denying of them, unless we will be so absurd, as to deny not only the reason, but the certainty of the outward senses, not only of one, or two, or three, but of mankind in general. That this case is so very plain, that nothing but want of thought can hinder any to discover it. That they must yield it to be so plain, unless they can show some forgery, which has all the four marks before set down. But if they cannot do this, they must quit their cause, and yield a happy victory over themselves ; or else sit down under all that ignominy, with which they have loaded the priests, of being, not only the most pernicious, but (what will gall them more) the most inconsiderate, and inconsiderable of mankind.

Therefore, let them not think it an undervaluing of their worthiness, that their whole cause is comprised within so narrow a compass : and no more time bestowed upon it than it is worth.

But let them, rather, reflect, how far they have been all this time from Christianity ; whose rudiments they are yet to learn ! How far from the way of salvation ! How far the race of their lives is run, before they have set one step in the road to heaven. And therefore how much diligence they ought to use, to redeem all that time they have lost, lest they lose themselves for ever, and be convinced, by a dreadful experience, when it is too late, that the Gospel is a truth, and of the last consequence.

A SECOND LETTER BY THE REV. CHARLES LESLIE.

SIR ;—I HAVE read over your papers with great satisfaction, and I heartily bless God with you, and for you, that he has had mercy upon you, and opened your eyes, to see the wondrous things of his law, to convince you of those irrefragable proofs he has afforded for the truth and authority of the Holy Scriptures, such as no other writing on earth

can pretend to, and which are incompatible with any forgery or deceit. He has given you likewise that true spirit of repentance to bring forth the fruits thereof; that is, to make what satisfaction you can for the injuries you have done to religion, by answering what has been published formerly by yourself against it; and being converted, you endeavor to strengthen your brethren.

I. CREATION.

You have laid the true foundation of the being of God, against the Atheist; of his creation of the world, and providence, against the asserters of blind chance. If all be chance, then their thoughts are so too; and there's no reasoning or argument in the world.

Others, because they know not what to say, suppose the world and all things in it to have been from eternity, and to have gone on, as now, in a constant succession of men begetting men, trees springing from trees, &c. without any beginning.

But if it was always as it is now, then every thing had a beginning, every man, bird, beast, tree, &c. And what has a beginning, cannot be without a beginning.

Therefore as it is evident that nothing can make itself, it is equally evident that a succession of things made must have a beginning. A succession of beginnings cannot be without a beginning; for that would be literally a beginning without a beginning, which is a contradiction in terms.

II. PROVIDENCE.

As to deny Providence in the first cause, is the denying of a God: Whence had we our providence? For we find we have a providence to forecast and contrive how to preserve and govern that which we make or acquire: therefore there must be a providence much more eminently in God, to preserve and govern all the works which he has made. He that made the eye, does he not see? And he who put providence into the heart of man, has he none himself?

And the glory of his wisdom and power seems greater to us in the acts of his providence than even in those of creation, especially in his governing the actions of free agents, without taking from them the freedom of their will to do as they list, and turning their very evil into good by the almightiness of his wisdom. We see great part of this every day before our eyes, in his turning the counsels of the wise into foolishness, and trapping the wicked into the works of their own hands. This strikes us more sensibly, and is nearer to us than the making of a tree or a star; and we feel that over-ruling power in his providence which we contemplate in his creation.

When the sins of men are increased to provoke God to take vengeance, he permits the spirit of fury to incline their wills to war and destruction of each other, and nation rises up against nation; and when in his mercy he thinks the punishment is sufficient, he calms their rage like the roaring of the sea, and there is peace. And they are so free agents in all this, that they think it is all their own doing; and so really it is, though under the unseen direction of a Superior Power.

But not only in the public transactions of the world his providence is

observable; there is no man who has taken notice of his own life, but must find it as to his very private affairs, a thought sometimes darting into his mind to rid him out of a difficulty, or show him an advantage, which he could not find in much considering before. At other times a man's mind is so clouded as if his eyes were shut, that he cannot see his way. Again, several events which he thought most *funest*,* and his utter ruin, he finds afterwards to be much for the best, and that he had been undone if that had not happened which he feared. On the other hand, many things which he thought for his greatest benefit, he has found to be for his hurt. This shows a providence which sees further than we can, and disposes all our actions, though done in the full freedom of our own will, to what events, either good or bad for us, as he pleases.

III. REVELATION.

But these considerations from the creation and providence, though admirable and glorious, are within the oracles of reason, and are but earthly things, in comparison of those heavenly things which God has revealed to man at sundry times, and in divers manners, and are recorded in the Holy Scriptures, and which otherwise it was impossible for man to have known. "For what man is he that can know the counsel of God? Or who can think what the will of the Lord is? For the thoughts of mortal men are miserable, and our devices are but uncertain; for the corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth upon many things; and hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon earth, and with labor do we find the things that are before us: but the things that are in heaven, who hath searched out?"†

This then must be purely the subject of revelation; but when the deist is come thus far, he is entered into a wide field; for all religions, Jewish, Heathen, Christian and Mahometan, pretend to revelation for their original.

To clear this point was the design of the Short Method with the deists, which gave the first opportunity to our conversation.

The Heathen and Mahometan religions not only want those marks (there set down) which ascertain the truth of fact, but their morals and worship are impure, and inconsistent with the attributes of God; as the indulgence of fornication and uncleanness among the Heathen, and their human sacrifices (most abhorrent to the God of holiness and mercy) and the filthy obscenity of their very *sacra*; besides the great defect of their morals which knew no such thing as humility, forgiveness of injuries, loving their enemies, and returning good for evil. Some of their philosophers spoke against revenging of injuries, as bringing greater injury to ourselves, or not worth the while; but not upon the account of humanity and love to our brethren, and doing them good, though they did evil to us; and by the word *humilitas*, they meant only a lowness and dejection of mind, which is a vice; but they had no notion of it as a virtue, in having a low opinion of one's self, and in honor preferring others before us: this they thought a vice and abjection of spirits. You may see pride and self-conceit run through all their philosophy, be-

* Deadly, mortal.

† Wisdom, ix. 13, 14, 15, 16.

besides their principle of increasing their empire, by conquering other countries who did them no harm, whom they called barbarians.

Into this class comes likewise the Sensual Paradise proposed by Mahomet, and his principle of propagating his religion by the sword.

The Jewish religion has all the certainty of fact, and its morals are good; but because of the hardness of their hearts, they came not up to the primitive purity, as in case of polygamy and divorce, wherein our blessed Saviour reduces them to the original, that from the beginning it was not so; and in several other cases mentioned in his sermon upon the Mount.

Therefore the perfection of morals, and of the true knowledge of God, was reserved for the Christian religion, which has, in more abundant manner than even the Jewish, the infallible marks of the truth of the facts, in the multitude and notoriety of the miracles wrought by our blessed Saviour beyond those of Moses. Which fully answers the objection of the Jews, that Christ wrought his miracles by Beelzebub: for then, as he said to them, "By whom do your children cast out devils?" Was it by the spirit of God or Beelzebub, that Moses and the prophets wrought their miracles?"

Then from the purity and heavenliness of his doctrines, all levelled to destroy the kingdom of Satan, those wicked principles and idolatrous worship which he had set up in the world; the other answer of our blessed Saviour concludes demonstratively, of a kingdom divided against itself; that if Satan cast out Satan to promote that doctrine which Christ taught, we must alter our notion of the devil, and suppose him to be good, and his kingdom must then be at an end; which we see not yet done, for wickedness still reigns in the world.

IV. OBJECT. AS TO THE HOLY TRINITY.

Against these things reason has nothing to object, but then prejudices are raised up against what is revealed, as being of things that are above our reason, and out of its reach; as chiefly the doctrine of the blessed Trinity.

In answer to which we may consider, that if such things were not above our reason, there needed no revelation of them, but only a bare proposal of them to our reason, made by any body without any authority, and their own evidence would carry them through.

In the next place, we must acknowledge that there are many things in the Divine nature far out of the reach of our reason. That it must be so: for how can finite comprehend infinite? Who can think what eternity is? A duration without beginning, or succession of parts or time! Who can so much as imagine or frame any idea of a being, neither made by itself, nor by any other? Of omnipresence? Of a boundless immensity? &c.

Yet all this reason obliges us to allow, as the necessary consequences of a first cause.

And where any thing is established upon the full proof of reason, there ten thousand objections or difficulties, though we cannot answer them, are of no force at all to overthrow it. Nothing can do that, but to refute those reasons upon which it is established; till when the truth and certainty of the thing remains unshaken, though we cannot explain it, nor solve the difficulties that arise from it.

And if it is so, upon the point of reason, much more upon that of revelation, where the subject matter is above our reason, and could never have been found out by it.

All to be done in that case is, to satisfy ourselves of the truth of the fact, that such things were revealed of God, and are no imposture. This is done, as to the Holy Scriptures, by the four marks before-mentioned.

And as to the contradiction alledged in three being one, it is no contradiction, unless it be said, that three are one, in the self same respect: for in divers respects there is no sort of difficulty, that one may be three, or three thousand; as one army may consist of many thousands, and yet it is but one army: there is but one human nature, and yet there are multitudes of persons who partake of that nature.

Now it is not said that the three persons in the Divine nature are one person, that would be a contradiction: but it is said, that the three persons are one nature. They are not three and one in the same respect; they are three as to persons, and one as to nature. Here is no contradiction.

Again, that may be a contradiction in one nature, which is not so in another: for example; it is a contradiction that a man can go two yards or miles as soon as one, because two is but one and another one; yet this is no contradiction to sight, which can reach a star as soon as the top of a chimney; and the sun darts his rays in one instant from heaven to earth: but more than all these is the motion of thought, to which no distance of place is any interruption; which can arrive at Japan as soon as at a yard's distance; and can run into the immensity of possibilities.

Now there are no words possible, whereby to give any notion or idea of sight or light to a man born blind: and consequently to reconcile the progress of sight or light to him from being an absolute contradiction; because he can measure it no otherwise than according to the motion of legs or arms, for he knows none other: therefore we cannot charge that as a contradiction in one nature, which is so in another, unless we understand both natures perfectly well: and therefore we cannot charge that as a contradiction in the incomprehensible nature of being three in one, though we found it to be so in our nature; which we do not, because, as before said, they are not three and one in the same respect.

Now, let us further consider, that though there is no comparison between finite and infinite, yet we have nearer resemblances of the three and one in God, than there is of sight to a man born blind. For there is nothing in any of the other four senses that has any resemblance at all to that of seeing, or that can give such a man any notion whatever of it.

But we find in our own nature, which is said to be made after the image of God, a very near resemblance of his Holy Trinity, and of the different operations of each of the Divine Persons.

For example; to know a thing present, and to remember what is past, and to love or hate, are different operations of our mind, and performed by different faculties of it. Of these, the understanding is the father faculty, and gives being to things, as to us; for what we know not, is to us as if it were not. This answers to creation. From this faculty proceeds the second, that of memory, which is a preserving of what the understanding has created to us. Then the third faculty, that of the will, which loves or hates, proceeds from both the other; for we cannot love or hate what is not first created by the understanding, and preserved to us by the memory.

And though these are different faculties, and their operations different, that the second proceeds from the first, or is begotten by it; and the third proceeds from the first and second in conjunction, so that one is before the other in order of nature, yet not in time; for they are all congenial,

and one is as soon in the soul as the other ; and yet they make not three souls, but one soul. And though their operations are different, and the one proceeds from the other, yet no one can act without the other, and they all concur to every act of each ; for in understanding and remembering, there is a concurrent act of the will to consent to such understanding or remembering, so that no one can act without the other ; in which sense none is before or after the other, nor can any of them be or exist without the other.

But what we call faculties in the soul, we call persons in the Godhead ; because there are personal actions attributed to each of them ; as that of sending, and being sent ; to take flesh, and be born, &c.

And we have no other word whereby to express it ; we speak it after the manner of men ; nor could we understand, if we heard any of those unspeakable words, which express the Divine Nature in its proper essence ; therefore we must make allowances, and great ones, when we apply words of our nature to the Infinite and Eternal Being. We must not argue strictly and philosophically from them, more than from God's being said to repent, to be angry, &c. They are words *ad captum*, in condescension to our weak capacities, and without which we could not understand.

But this I say, that there are nearer resemblances afforded to us of this ineffable mystery of the Holy Trinity, than there is betwixt one of our outward senses and another, than there is to a blind man of colors, or of the motion of light or sight : and a contradiction in the one will not infer a contradiction in the other : though it is impossible to be solved, as in the instance before given of a man born blind, till we come to know both natures distinctly.

And if we had not the experience of the different faculties of our mind, the contradiction would appear irreconcilable to all our philosophy, how three could be one, each distinct from the other, yet but one soul : one proceeding from, or being begot by the other ; and yet all coeval, and none before or after the other : and as to the difference betwixt faculties and persons, substance and subsistence, it is a puzzling piece of philosophy. And though we give not a distinct subsistence to a faculty, it has an existence, and one faculty can no more be another, than one person can be another : so that the case seems to be alike in both, as to what concerns our present difficulty of three and one ; besides what before is said, that by the word person, when applied to God, (for want of a proper word whereby to express it) we must mean something infinitely different from personality among men. And therefore from a contradiction in the one (suppose it granted) we cannot charge a contradiction in the other, unless we understand it as well as the other ; for how else can we draw the parallel ?

What a vain thing is our philosophy, when we would measure the incomprehensible nature by it ! When we find it non-plust in our own nature, and that in many instances. If I am all in one room, is it not a contradiction that any part of me should be in another room ? Yet it was a common saying among philosophers, that the soul is all in all, and all in every part of the body : how is the same individual soul present, at one and the same time, to actuate the distant members of the body, without either multiplication or division of the soul ? Is there any thing in the body can bear any resemblance to this, without a manifest contradiction ? Nay, even as to bodies, is anything more a self-evident

principle, than that the cause must be before the effect ? Yet the light and heat of the sun are as old as the sun ; and supposing the sun to be eternal, they would be as eternal.

And as light and heat are of the nature of the sun, and as the three faculties before mentioned are of the nature of the soul, so that the soul could not be a soul if it wanted any of them ; so may we, from small things to great, apprehend without any contradiction, that the three persons are of the very nature and essence of the Deity ; and so of the same substance with it ; and though one proceeding from the other, (as the faculties of the soul do) yet that all three are consubstantial, co-eternal, and of necessary existence as God is ; for that these three are God, and God is these three. As understanding, memory and will are a soul ; and a soul is understanding, memory and will.

I intend (God willing) to treat of this subject more largely by itself ; but I have said thus much here, to clear the way from that objection of rejecting revelations, (though we are infallibly sure of the fact) because of the supposed contradiction to our reason, in comparing it with our earthly things.

V. OF THE DIFFERENCES AMONG CHRISTIANS.

But now, that from all the proofs of the certainty of the revelation we are come to fix in Christianity, our labor is not yet at an end ; for here you see multiplicity of sects and divisions, which our blessed Saviour foretold should come, for the probation of the elect : as some Canaanites were left in the land to teach the Israelites the use of war, lest by too profound a peace, they might grow lazy and stupid, and become an easy prey to their enemies. So might Christianity be lost among us ; if we had nothing to do, it would dwindle and decay, and corrupt by degrees, as water stagnates by standing still : but when we are put to contend earnestly for the faith, it quickens our zeal, keeps us upon our guard, trims our lamp, and furbishes the sword of the spirit, which might otherwise rust in its scabbard. And it gives great opportunity to show us the wonderful providence and protection of God over his church, in preserving her against a visibly unequal force. And in this contest, to some this high privilege is granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.* These go to make up the noble army of martyrs and confessors, for ever triumphant in heaven. Others conquer even here on earth, that God's wonderful doings may be known to the children of men.

But as he who builds a tower, ought first to compute the expense, and he who goes to war to consider his strength ; so our blessed Saviour has instructed us, that he who will be his disciple, must resolve beforehand to take up his cross daily, to forsake father and mother, and wife and children, and lands and life itself, when he cannot keep them with the truth and sincerity of the Gospel. Therefore we must put on the "whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand in the evil day, "and having overcome all, to stand ; for we wrestle not against flesh "and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers "of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high places."

And what is it we wrestle for ! For the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, &c.

* Phil. i. 29.

AN ESSAY
ON THE
INSPIRATION
OF THE
OLD SCRIPTURES
OF THE
OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT.

BY JOHN DICK, A. M.

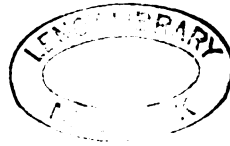
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P R E F A C E .

the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures is a subject, on which it is of great importance to form just and accurate ideas. If they be the compositions of men, who, though honest, and upon the whole well informed, were under no infallible assistance or direction, they are not entitled to the same reverence, as if they had been dictated by the Spirit of God ; nor can we read them with the same confidence in their counsels and instructions. Their contents must be subjected to a strict examination, and the truth of their doctrines must be ascertained by other evidence than the authority of the writers, before we can yield to them a rational assent. It is evident that such a view of the Scriptures would involve us in endless inquiries and disputations, and giving scope to unrestrained speculation, would favor the introduction of the wild and most contradictory opinions. There would be no fixed standard to which we could appeal. But if the Sacred Books be inspired, these inconveniences are obviated. Discussion is superseded, except with regard to their meaning ; and as they are in general perspicuous, and easy to be understood, we may, by due application, attain certain knowledge of the essential doctrines and duties of religion.

An attentive observer cannot have failed to remark a very striking peculiarity of the present times. It is the influence of the principles of infidelity upon many professors of Christian religion. The bold opposition made to some doctrines of revelation, renders them ashamed, or afraid to avow them, without, at least, such qualifications and excuses, as shall smooth their asperities, and lessen their apparent incredibility. In some instances such concessions are made, as amount to a complete surrender of the point at debate. The inspiration of the Scriptures is an article of our faith against which infidels have directed all the arguments which their ingenuity could furnish, and the abuse which their malice could invent. What is the consequence ? Many confessed champions of christianity seem to have concluded that the article is not defensible, because it hath been furiously assailed ; and accordingly they have abandoned it wholly, or in part, to the enemy. Few writers, indeed, who now undertake to defend the cause of revelation, hold the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. That which has become unfashionable ; it is classed with other opinions of our fathers, which have exploded as the fooleries of enthusiasm, and superstitious credulity ; and he only is supposed to think rationally on the subject, who looks upon the Sacred Books as wholly human and partly inspired ; as a heterogeneous compound of the oracles of God, and the stories and sentiments of men. There are even some, by whom this partial inspiration is denied, and the Scriptures are regarded as the writings of faithful but fallible men, who had nothing to preserve them from error but the accuracy of their information, and the integrity of their hearts. The spirit of infidelity is working among christians themselves.

The Inspiration of the Scriptures is a point which christians are too generally charged with taking upon trust. Few of them study the arguments by which it is evinced, and provide themselves with answers to the objections which infidels oppose to it. It is a doctrine which hath been received by tradition from their fathers, and which, upon

PREFACE.

their authority, the greater part believe to be true. We need not wonder, then, that, in a time of trial like the present, when the efforts of infidelity are unusually bold and vigorous, there should be a great falling away among the professors of religion; nor can such apostacy be deplored on any other ground, than as it affects the immortal interests of those who are involved in it. It is attended with no real loss to the cause of revelation, and it reflects no dishonor upon it: for of what advantage are numbers, if they be destitute of principle; and what discredit can arise to the Scriptures from the desertion of persons, whose attachment was less the effect of deliberate choice than of accident? There is no reason for being alarmed, as if such an event portended a general defection. Raw, undisciplined troops may give way at the first onset; but veterans, skilled in the art of defence, and accustomed to danger will keep the field, in defiance of the most furious attacks of the enemy.

It is unquestionably our duty to bewail the progress of unbelief and error; but we ought not, even during their greatest triumph, to suffer our minds to sink into despondency. The interests of truth are patronized by the Ruler of the world, who is able to render events apparently the most adverse, conducive to their prosperity; and who, by a sublime and mysterious process, is continually bringing good out of evil. May we not hope, that at this moment, God is purifying the church, by the agency of her enemies; and that, while their endeavors to destroy christianity shall ultimately serve to diffuse it more widely, and establish it more firmly, the immediate effect shall be, to render its friends more steady and courageous; to give new vigor to their faith, and new ardor to their zeal? On the side of infidelity, numbers may increase; but the faithful will present a closer phalanx, which no menaces can intimidate, and no force can overcome.

When the importance of the subject, and the circumstances of the times, are considered, no apology will be expected, for an attempt to illustrate and defend the inspiration of the Scriptures. An apology may be necessary for the imperfect manner in which a point of such magnitude is treated; but while the author is sensible, that the execution is not equal either to the design, or to his own wishes, he will not, by affecting to depreciate his labors, incur the charge of presenting to the public, what he acknowledges to be unworthy of its notice. Of the reasons which induced him first to discuss the subject, in some sermons preached to the congregation under his care, (the congregation of Slateford), and afterwards to enlarge and throw them into their present form, a detail could serve no valuable end, and shall therefore be suppressed. He has given a concise account of the arguments, which appeared to his own mind to prove, in the clearest and most convincing manner, the Divine authority of the books of the Old and New Testament. His labor will not be lost, if the following Essay be the means of reclaiming any of those unhappy persons, who have exchanged christianity for that mixture of folly and impiety, which is arrogantly styled reason and philosophy; or of enabling any christian, who is exposed to the assaults, and perplexed with the sophistry of unbelievers, to "hold fast the profession of his faith without wavering."

AN

ESSAY ON INSPIRATION.

INTRODUCTION AND PLAN.

LATION, in its progress, bears an analogy to light, which, faintly
ing in the dawn, brightens into the full splendor of noon; or to
which, feeble in infancy, and confined in its operations, becomes
, in manhood, of the most profound researches, and embraces
le circle of science.

ased God to make known his will, not at once, but by gradual
ies; and, in employing this method, he manifested both his
and his goodness. An intelligent parent, in instructing his
, accommodates himself to the weakness of their faculties; and,
ing with first principles and simple elements, leads them forward,
essive steps to perfection. According to the same plan, God
icated spiritual information "in various portions,"* as the cir-
ices of the church required; giving only, in the first ages, a few
notices of good things to come, and enlarging the revelation, as
fixed for the appearance of the Messiah approached. We trace
but progressive opening of the scheme from the first hint of a
after the fall, to the ample and minute description of his char-
ad actions, in the writings of Isaiah. Having, by the figures of
, and the doctrine of the prophets, prepared the minds of men
ore perfect dispensation, he favored them, "in the last days,"
inal and complete declaration of his gracious counsels, by Jesus
who lay from eternity in his bosom, and was qualified, in the
nature, for his high office, by the Holy Ghost, with whom he was
d.

revelation made by the ministry of the prophets, and of Christ
apostles, was of inestimable advantage to those to whom it was
ately addressed, as it disclosed to them truths the most sublime
eresting, precepts the most salutary, and promises fraught with
etest consolations. But it was not intended solely for their bene-
velation now completed, was destined to be a blessing to mankind
e. From Judea, as a central spot, the knowledge of the truth
be diffused among the nations of the earth; and it was to descend
ule of faith and practice, to the latest posterity.

design would have been frustrated, had no effectual method been
l to preserve the revelation. If, by the pious care of parents,
the public teachers of religion, it might have been transmitted,
e degree of purity, to the generation immediately following;

* i. e. 1, 2, the word *πολυμερως*, which we translate, "at sundry times," signifies
y parts or portions."

though this could have hardly been expected with regard either to the law of Moses, or to the Gospel, each of which comprehends such a variety of doctrines and facts, and such a multiplicity of particulars; in the course of a few generations, so much of it would have been lost, so many human dogmas and inventions would have been incorporated with it, and the parts which remained would have been so disfigured and adulterated, that the purpose for which it was given would have been entirely defeated. God, therefore, who foresaw all the evils which would ensue, if tradition were the only mode of conveying the knowledge of his will to future ages, hath not left us to search for the foundation of our faith, in obscure reports and narrations, in which the true and the fabulous are blended together. While he raised up certain persons to be the messengers and interpreters of his will, he usually employed them to commit their messages to writing. What is written is not liable to be forgotten, nor so apt to be corrupted, as what depends for its preservation on the tenaciousness of the memories, and the honesty of the intentions of those, in whose breasts it is deposited. It may pass from age to age, without sustaining any injury; and may reach the utmost limits of time, without material alteration. By this expedient, the revelation hath been preserved; and we, who are now alive, enjoy it, in equal purity and integrity, as they did, who heard the prophets, or Christ and his apostles, with their own lips declaring the wonderful works of God.

The design of the following chapters is to state the arguments which make it reasonable in us to believe, that the books in which it is contained were Divinely inspired. Acknowledging the Bible to be the word of God, and assigning to it an authority above every human composition, we should be able to give a satisfactory account of this part of our conduct to any man that asks us. Paul affirms, in the second epistle to Timothy, that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" but it will be easily perceived, that this assertion is not a sufficient reason, why we should believe the inspiration of those writings, which are reputed sacred among us. The same claim is advanced by books, which we certainly know to have been written by wicked and designing men. According to the principles of common sense, and impartial reasoning, the testimony of the Scriptures in their own favor ought no more to be admitted, than the testimony of any other writing concerning itself, till we see it supported by satisfactory evidence. Their testimony, indeed, we know to be true; but of its truth no man can be fully assured, who hath not discovered such internal characters, or such external attestations, as amount to a proof of their heavenly origin. If we believe their divinity without examination, in what respect do we differ from those, who, on the authority of their ancestors or their priests, receive the Koran of Mahomet, or the sacred books of any other nation, as revelations from God? With a faith so repugnant to reason, and so incapable of defence, how easily shall we be puzzled by the cavils, and bewildered by the sophisms of infidelity?

The boldness and activity of the enemies of revelation are distinguishing features of the age. Formerly our religion was attacked with some reserve, and the assailants found it expedient to conceal their pur-

pose under a mask of decency and respect ; but now the infidel, with undaunted and unblushing front, proclaims aloud to the world his hostility to the Gospel. Impatient, too, of the limits within which he was accustomed to confine his exertions, instead of addressing the great and the wealthy, he goes, with a spirit of proselytism worthy of a better cause, in quest of converts among the vulgar ; and strives, by specious arguments, deliberate misrepresentation, confident assertions, scurrility and ridicule to pervert their judgments and corrupt their hearts. When the danger increases, our vigilance should be doubled, and our precautions should be multiplied. The peril of the present times, therefore, loudly calls upon us to examine with care the evidences of our religion, and to acquaint ourselves with the arguments by which the inspiration of the Scriptures is demonstrated, that no man may spoil us, "through philosophy and vain deceit," of that precious treasure, with which our most valuable earthly possessions deserve not to be compared.

In order to assist those, who may peruse this Essay, in conducting an inquiry so interesting, I shall observe the following plan.

FIRST, I shall give an account of the inspiration of the Scriptures ; or shall show in what sense I believe them to be inspired.

In the SECOND place, I shall point out those writings, the inspiration of which is asserted by the Christian church ; and assign some reasons why we attribute a Divine origin to them alone.

In the THIRD place, I shall prove the Inspiration of the Scriptures, by a variety of arguments.

LASTLY, I shall consider the principal objections of infidels against their inspiration.

CHAPTER I.

The Nature of Inspiration ; or, the sense in which the Scriptures are inspired.

I DEFINE Inspiration to be such an influence of the Holy Ghost on the understandings, imaginations, memories, and other mental powers of the writers of the sacred books, as perfectly qualified them for communicating to the world the knowledge of the will of God. The definition is expressed in general terms ; and it will be necessary therefore, in order to give clear and precise ideas of the subject, to descend to particulars.

Instead of retailing the opinions of others, I shall submit to the consideration of the reader, the following account of the inspiration of the Scriptures :

I. There are many things in the Scriptures, which the writers might have known, and probably did know, by ordinary means. As persons possessed of memory, judgment, and the other intellectual faculties which are common to men, they were able to relate events, in which they had been personally concerned ; and to make such occasional reflections, as were suggested by particular subjects and occurrences. In these cases, no supernatural influence was necessary to enlighten and invigorate their minds : it was only necessary, that they should be infallibly pre-

served from error. They did not need a revelation to inform them of what had passed before their eye, nor to point out those inferences and moral maxims, which were obvious to every attentive and considerate observer. Moses could tell without a Divine afflatus, that on such a night the Israelites marched out of Egypt, and at such a place they murmured against God; and Solomon could remark, that "a soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger;" or, that "better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith."* It is with respect to such passages of Scripture alone, as it did not exceed the natural ability of the writer to compose, that I would admit the notion of *superintendence*, if it should be admitted at all. But, perhaps, this word, though of established use, and almost undisputed authority, should be entirely laid aside, as insufficient to express even the lowest degree of inspiration. In the passages of Scripture, which we are now considering, I conceive the writers to have been not merely superintended, that they might commit no error, but likewise to have been moved or excited, by the Holy Ghost, to reveal particular events, and set down particular observations. They were not like other historians, who introduce facts and reflections into their narratives, in the exercise of their own judgment, and according to their own ideas of propriety; but they rather resembled amanuenses, who commit to writing those things only which are selected for them by their employer. Passages written by the direction and under the care of the Divine Spirit, may be said, in an inferior sense, to be inspired; whereas, had the men written them at the suggestion of their own spirit, they would have been, in every respect, human productions, and, though free from error, would have been exactly on a level with those parts of profane writings, which are agreeable to truth. Superintendence, indeed, is no peculiar kind of inspiration; but is the care exercised by Providence over all the sacred writers, in whatever degree or manner inspired, to secure a faithful relation of the histories, doctrines, prophecies and precepts, which they were employed to communicate to mankind.

II. There are other passages of Scripture, in composing which, the minds of the writers must have been supernaturally endowed with more than ordinary vigor. It is impossible for us, and perhaps it was not possible for the inspired writer himself, to determine, where nature ended, and inspiration began. He could not have marked, with precision, the limits which separated the natural operation of his faculties, and the agency of the Spirit of God. It is enough to know, in general, that there are many parts of Scripture, in which, though the unassisted mind might have proceeded some steps, a Divine impulse was necessary to enable it to advance. I think, for example, that the evangelists could not have written the history of Christ if they had not enjoyed miraculous assistance. Two of them, Matthew and John, accompanied our Saviour, during the whole, or the greater part of the time of his personal ministry. At the close of that period, or rather a considerable number of years after it, the gospel of Matthew having been published, as is generally agreed, at least eight years, and that of John between sixty and seventy, posterior to the ascension, we may be certain, that they had forgotten some of his discourses and miracles; that they recollected

* Prov. xv. 1. 17.

others indistinctly; and that, if left to themselves, they would have been in danger of producing an unfair and inaccurate account, by omissions and additions, or by confounding one thing with another. Simple and illiterate men, who had never been accustomed to exercise their intellectual faculties, could not, it is probable, have retailed his shorter discourses, immediately after they were delivered, and much less those of greater length, as his sermon on the mount, and his last instructions to his disciples. Besides, from so large a mass of materials, writers of uncultivated minds, such as Jewish fishermen and publicans may be conceived to have been, who were not in the habit of distinguishing and classifying, could not have made a judicious selection; nor would persons unskilled in the art of composition, have been able to express themselves in such terms, as should ensure a faithful representation of doctrines and facts, and with such dignity as the nature of the subject required. A Divine influence, therefore, must have been exerted on their minds, by which their memories and judgments were invigorated, and they were enabled to relate the doctrines and miracles of their Master with fidelity, and in a manner the best fitted to impress the readers of their histories. The promise of the Holy Ghost to bring to their remembrance all things whatsoever Christ had said to them,* proves, that in writing their Gospels, their mental powers received from his agency new degrees of strength and capacity.

Farther, there are several passages of Scripture, in which there is such elevation of thought, and of style, as clearly shows the faculties of the writers to have been raised above their ordinary pitch. There is a grandeur, a sublimity of ideas and expressions, to which their acknowledged powers bore no proportion, and which, therefore, must have resulted from superior influence upon them. Should a person of moderate talents give as elevated a description of the majesty and attributes of God, or reason as profoundly on the mysterious doctrines of religion, as a man of the most exalted genius and extensive learning, we could not fail to be convinced, that he was supernaturally assisted; and the conviction would be still stronger, if his composition should transcend the highest efforts of the human mind. In either of these cases, it would be impossible to account for his production, by the operation of any ordinary cause. Some of the sacred writers were taken from the lowest ranks of life; and yet sentiments so dignified, and representations of divine things so grand and majestic, occur in their writings, that the noblest flights of human genius, when compared with them, appear cold and insipid. This remark on the matter and language of Scripture admits of an obvious application to the prophetic and devotional books of the Old Testament; and may be extended to many other passages, in which the purest and most sublime lessons are delivered on the subject of God and religion, by the natives of a country, unacquainted with the philosophy, the literature, and the arts of the more polished nations of antiquity.

III. It is manifest, with respect to many passages of Scripture, that the subjects, of which they treat, must have been directly revealed to the writers. They could not have been known by any natural means; nor was the knowledge of them attainable by a simple elevation of the

* John xiv. 26.

faculties, because they were not deductions from the principles of reason, or from truths already discovered, but were founded in the free determinations of the will of God, and his prescience of human affairs. With the abilities of an angel we could not explore the thoughts and purposes of the divine mind. This degree of inspiration we attribute to those who were empowered to reveal heavenly mysteries, "which eye had not seen, and ear had not heard;" to those who were sent with particular messages from God to his people; and to those who were employed to predict future events. The plan of redemption being an effect of the sovereign counsels of heaven, it could not have been known but by a communication from the Father of lights.

This kind of inspiration has been called the inspiration of *suggestion*, it is needless to dispute about a word; but *suggestion* seeming to express an immediate operation on the mind, by which ideas are excited in it, is of too limited signification to denote the various modes in which the prophets and apostles were made acquainted with supernatural truths. God revealed himself to them, not only by suggestion, but by dreams, visions, voices, and the ministry of angels. This degree of inspiration, in strict propriety of speech, should be called *revelation*; a word preferable to suggestion, because it is expressive of all the ways in which God communicated new ideas to the minds of his servants. It is a word too, chosen by the Holy Ghost himself, to signify the discovery of truths formerly unknown to the apostles. The last book of the New Testament, which is a collection of prophecies, is called the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. Paul says that he received his Gospel by *revelation*; that "by *revelation* the mystery was made known to him, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it was then *revealed* unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;" and, in another place, having observed, that "eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had entered into the heart of man the things which God had prepared for them that love him," he adds, "but God hath *revealed* them unto us by his Spirit."*

I have not names to designate the two other kinds of inspiration. The names used by Doddridge and others, superintendence, elevation, and suggestion, do not convey the ideas stated in the preceding particulars; and are liable to material objections, as we have already shown, with respect to the first and the last of them. Superintendence does not include the notion of a moving or exciting influence on the minds of the sacred writers, and consequently cannot denote any kind of inspiration; and suggestion being of too limited a meaning to express all that is intended, ought to give place to a more appropriate word, furnished by the Holy Spirit himself. By those, who use the term elevation, to signify a particular kind of inspiration, it is confined to such parts of Scripture as are lofty and sublime; whereas, it is easy to perceive, that there must have been, in some cases, an elevation of the faculties, or a raising of them above their usual degree of vigor, even when the province of the writer was simple narrative. This hath been proved, by a particular reference to the evangelists. The account, which hath been now given of the inspiration of the Scriptures, has, I think, these two recommendations, that there is no part of them, which

* Rev. i. 1. Gal. i. 12. Eph. iii. 3, 5. 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

does not fall under one or other of the three foregoing heads ; and that it carefully discriminates the different kinds or degrees of the agency of the Divine Spirit on the minds of the different writers.*

Some men have adopted very strange and dangerous notions respecting the inspiration of the Scriptures. Dr. Priestly denies, that they were written by a particular Divine inspiration, and asserts, that the writers, though men of the greatest probity, were fallible, and have actually committed mistakes in their narrations and their reasonings. We must not anticipate the arguments which refute this opinion, whether advanced by a heretic or an infidel ; and I shall, therefore only observe, that this man and his followers find it their interest to weaken, and set aside the authority of the Scriptures, as they have adopted a system of religion, from which all the distinguishing doctrines of revelation are excluded. Others consider the Scriptures as inspired in those places, where they profess to deliver the word of God ; but in other places, especially in the historical parts, they ascribe to them only the same authority which is due to the writings of well-informed and upright men. But as this distinction is perfectly arbitrary, having no foundation in any thing said by the sacred writers themselves, so it is liable to very serious objections. It represents our Lord and his apostles, when they spoke of the Old Testament, as having attested, without any exception or limitation, a number of books as Divinely inspired, while some of them were partly, and some were almost entirely human compositions. It supposes the writers of both Testaments to have profanely mixed their own productions with the dictates of the Spirit ; and to have passed the unhallowed compound on the world as genuine. In fact, by denying that they were constantly under infallible guidance, it leaves us utterly at a loss to know when we should, or should not believe them. If they could blend their own stories with the revelations made to them, how can I be certain, that they have not, on some occasions, published, in the name of God, sentiments of their own, to which they were desirous to gain credit and authority ? Who will assure me of their perfect fidelity in drawing a line of distinction, between the Divine and the human parts of their writings ? The denial of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures tends to unsettle the foundations of our faith ; involves us in doubt and perplexity ; and leaves us no method of ascertaining how much we should believe, except an appeal to reason. But when reason is invested with the authority of a judge, not only is revelation dishonored, and its Author insulted, but the end for which it was given, is completely defeated. Instead of being admitted as the supreme standard of human

* According to the Jews, there were three kinds of inspiration, or modes of revelation. The books of Moses they ascribe to that kind of revelation, which they call *mouth to mouth*, or *face to face*, and in proof of which they quote, Numb. xii. 8. Some other books of the Old Testament proceeded from the *gift of prophecy*, of which they fancy several degrees corresponding to the different methods, which God used in revealing himself to the prophets. The remaining books were written by the *inspiration of the Holy Ghost* ; and to these they give the name of the *holy writings*. That there was a difference in the kind, or degree of inspiration must be admitted ; but this way of expressing it is inaccurate and absurd. The whole Scripture, and not a particular part of it only, was written by the inspiration of the Spirit. Can any thing be more ridiculous than to say, that the two books of Kings were written by the spirit of prophecy ; but that the two books of Chronicles, which so much resemble them, were written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost ?

opinions and practices in religion, it is degraded into a subordinate rule, and possesses no more authority than the fallible and capricious wisdom of men will allow it to exercise. A revelation, which must be subjected to a discussion of its contents as well as of its evidence, prior to its reception, could not serve any valuable purpose, which might not have been attained without it.

From the preceding account of inspiration, it is easy to perceive, in what sense the Scriptures in general may be pronounced to be the Word of God. We give them this designation, because all the parts of which they consist have been written by persons, moved, directed and assisted by his Holy Spirit; but we do not mean, that all the sentiments contained in them are just, and all the examples are worthy of imitation. In the sacred writings, we meet with sayings and actions, which are neither wiser nor better for being found in them, than if they had occurred in any ordinary history. I apprehend, that some persons, from want of reflection, fall into a mistake in this matter. They quote a sentiment as authoritative, because they read it in the Scriptures, without waiting to consider, by whom it was uttered; and draw arguments for the regulation of their own conduct and that of others, from an action, without previously examining, whether it received the Divine approbation or not. Yet it is certain, not only that wicked men and wicked spirits, are often introduced as speaking and acting, but that, as the saints of whom mention is made, were not perfect and infallible, any more than the saints who are now alive, their speeches and behavior must not instantly be presumed to be right, unless it appear, that they were under the influence of the Spirit of God, or their example be expressly or implicitly commended. From the mere admission of any fact into the inspired history, no other conclusion can be warrantably drawn, than that it actually took place, and it was the will of God, that we should be acquainted with it: its moral nature, its conformity or disconformity to the standard of truth and rectitude must be ascertained by some other method than its simple insertion in the Bible. Were clear ideas formed on this subject, some misapplications of passages would be prevented; and some objections which are brought against the inspiration of the sacred books, would either not be advanced at all, or, as we shall afterwards have occasion to show, would be immediately perceived to be ill-founded and inconclusive.

For the more complete elucidation of this point, let it be observed, that there are two senses considerably different in which a book may be denominated the word of God. In the first place, the meaning may be, that all the contents of the book were spoken or revealed by God himself; or that they proceeded directly from the eternal source of wisdom and purity, and by consequence, are all true and holy. It is evident, that, according to this sense of the word of God, the designation can be given only to a part of the Scriptures, because they contain, besides a revelation of the divine counsels, an account of human opinions, manners, customs, superstitions, and crimes. Sometimes, it is God who speaks, and at other times it is man. Now, we are presented with a view of his wise and holy dispensations; then, there is a delineation of the policy, the ambition, the folly of his creatures. In the second place, a book may be styled the Word of God, to signify, that it was composed by his direction and assistance, and that every thing contained in

it was inserted by his special appointment. It is plain, that consistently with this definition, there may be things in the book which were neither spoken nor approved by God, though for wise purposes, he has assigned them a place in it. In this sense, the title of the word of God is applicable to the Scriptures at large, the whole having been written by men whom he inspired, and who, being guided and controlled by his Spirit, could neither fall into error, nor be guilty of mutilating and corrupting it by omissions and interpolations. Hence we are authorized not only to consider all the doctrines, all the precepts, all the promises, and all the threatenings delivered by God himself, or by others in his name, as true, righteous and faithful; but farther to believe, that the events, which are said to have happened, and the words and actions, which are represented to have been spoken and done, did so happen, and were so spoken and done. But whether the conduct related be wise or foolish, moral or immoral, we must determine by the judgment pronounced in the Scriptures themselves on particular cases, or by applying those principles and general rules, which are laid down in them to regulate our decisions.

A question of great importance demands our attention, while we are endeavoring to settle, with precision, the notion of the inspiration of the Scriptures. It relates to the words, in which the sacred writers have expressed their ideas. On this subject Christians are divided in opinion, some maintaining, that, in the choice of words, they were left to their own discretion, and that the language is human, though the matter be Divine; while others believe, that, in their expressions, as well as in their sentiments, they were under the infallible direction of the Spirit. It is the last opinion, which appears to be conformable to truth; and it may be supported by the following reasoning.

Every man, who hath attended to the operations of his own mind, knows, that we think in words; or that when we form a train or combination of ideas, we clothe them with words; and that the ideas which are not thus clothed, are indistinct and confused. Let a man try to think upon any subject, moral or religious, without the aid of language, and he will either experience a total cessation of thought; or, as this seems impossible, at least while we are awake, he will feel himself constrained, notwithstanding his utmost endeavors, to have recourse to words as the instrument of his mental operations. As a great part of the Scriptures was suggested or revealed to the writers; and as the thoughts or sentiments, which were conveyed into their minds by the Spirit, were perfectly new to them, it is plain that they must have been accompanied with words proper to express them; and, consequently, that the words were dictated by the same influence on their minds, which communicated the ideas. The ideas could not have come without the words, because without them they could not have been conceived. A notion of the form and qualities of a material object may be produced by subjecting it to our senses; but there is no conceivable method of making us acquainted with new abstract truths, or with things which do not lie within the sphere of sensation, but by conveying to the mind, in some way or other, the words significant of them. In all those passages of Scripture, therefore, which were written by *revelation*, it is manifest, that the words were inspired; and this is still more evident, with respect to those passages which the writers themselves did not understand. No

man could write an intelligible discourse on a subject, which he does not understand, unless he were furnished with the words, as well as the sentiments; and that the penmen of the Scriptures did not always understand what they wrote, might be safely inferred from the comparative darkness of the dispensation under which some of them lived; and it is intimated by Peter, when he says, that the prophets "inquired and searched diligently what, and what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."* Their subsequent inquiries into the meaning of their own predictions, prove, that while they delivered the words, they had no distinct knowledge of the sense.

In other passages of Scripture, those not excepted in which the writers relate such things as had fallen within the compass of their own knowledge, we will be disposed to believe, that the words are inspired, if we calmly and seriously weigh the following considerations. If Christ promised to his disciples, that when they were brought before kings and governors for his sake, "it should be given them in that same hour what they should speak, and that the Spirit of their Father should speak in them;"† a promise which cannot be reasonably understood to signify less than that both words and sentiments should be dictated to them: it is fully as credible, that they were assisted in the same manner, when they wrote, especially as the record was to last through all ages, and to be a rule of faith to all the nations of the earth. Paul affirms, that he and the other apostles spoke, "not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost taught;"‡ and this general assertion may be applied to their writings, as well as to their sermons. Besides, every man who hath reflected upon the subject, is aware of the importance of a proper selection of words in expressing our sentiments; and knows how easy it is for a heedless or unskilful person, not only to injure the beauty and weaken the efficacy of a discourse, by the impropriety of his language, but by substituting one word for another, to which it seems to be equivalent, to alter the meaning, and perhaps render it totally different. If, then, the sacred writers had not been directed in the choice of words, how could we have been assured, that those, which they have chosen, were the most proper? Is it not possible, nay, is it not certain, that they would have sometimes expressed themselves inaccurately, as many of them were illiterate; and by consequence, would have obscured and misrepresented the truth? In this case, how could our faith have securely rested on their testimony? Would not the suspicion of error in their writings have rendered it necessary, before we received them, to try them by the standard of reason; and would not the authority and the design of revelation have thus been overthrown? We must conclude, therefore, that the words of Scripture are from God, as well as the matter; or we shall charge him with a want of wisdom, in transmitting his truths through a channel, by which they might have been, and most probably have been polluted.

To the inspiration of the words, the difference in the style of the sacred writers seems to be an objection; because, if the Holy Ghost were the author of the words, the style might be expected to be uniformly the same. But, in answer to this objection, it may be observed, that the

* 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. † Matt. x. 19, 20. Luke xii. 11 12. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 13.

Divine Spirit, whose operations are various, might act differently on different persons, according to the natural turn of their minds. He might enable one man, for instance, to write more sublimely than another, because he was naturally of a more exalted genius than the other, and the subject assigned to him demanded more elevated language; or, he might produce a difference in the style of the same man, by raising, at one time, his faculties above their ordinary state, and by leaving them, at another, to act according to their native energy, under his inspection and control. We should not suppose, that inspiration, even in its higher degrees, deprived those, who were the subjects of it, of the use of their faculties. They were, indeed, the organs of the Spirit; but they were conscious, intelligent organs. They were dependent, but distinct agents; and the operation of their mental powers, though elevated, and directed by superior influence, was analagous to their ordinary mode of procedure. It is easy, therefore, to conceive, that the style of the writers of the Scriptures should differ, just as it would have differed, if they had not been inspired. A perfect uniformity of style could not have taken place, unless they had all been inspired in the same degree, and by inspiration their faculties had been completely suspended; so that Divine truths were conveyed by them, in the same passive manner, in which a pipe affords a passage to water, or a trumpet to the breath.

The opinion, which I have thus endeavored to support, is not singular. It has been maintained by men of talents and learning; and seems to be the hypothesis, which a due reverence for the Scriptures will ultimately lead us to adopt. It would not have been consistent with the goodness, any more than with the wisdom of God, to subject a revelation of his will to the risk of being misrepresented by imperfect and inaccurate expressions, in consequence of which mankind would have been exposed to the inevitable danger of error. If, to evade this objection, it be granted, that a superintendence was exercised over the sacred writers, to preserve them from blunders in language, the point in question is virtually conceded. That superintendence implying, it is manifest, an influence on their minds, by which they were led to employ words and phrases, that would not have naturally occurred to them, rendered the style not properly their own, as it was confessedly different from what they would have used, if they had been left at full liberty to express themselves as they pleased. They did not write as their own genius freely prompted them; but under the secret direction and control of the Divine Spirit, who moulded their conceptions and guided their pens, in complete subservience to his own designs.

CHAPTER II.

Inspired Books—Apocryphal Books.

HAVING fixed the sense, in which we assert that certain writings are inspired, we proceed to ascertain what those writings are. Many books have appeared in the world claiming a heavenly origin: and there are many books, which, though they advance no such claim, contain nothing

but the pure doctrines, and holy precepts of religion. Yet, among all this number, we ascribe inspiration to those alone, which are commonly called the *Scriptures* of the Old and New Testament; the first of these collections beginning with Genesis, and ending with Malachi; the second beginning with Matthew, and ending with the Revelation.

But why, it may be asked, do we acknowledge these books, and these alone, to be Divinely inspired? Why from a multitude of claimants do we select a few individuals, and allow them the exclusive possession of that authority, to which all make equal pretensions? The only answer, which in this stage of our inquiry, it is necessary to give, is, that no other books have been handed down to us as inspired by the church, of whose duty it is an essential part, to point out to the observation of mankind that genuine revelation, which hath been committed to her care. We deny, indeed, that the authority of the *Scriptures* depends on her testimony; but, as they were entrusted to her as a sacred deposit, we consider her testimony as furnishing a strong argument in favor of their inspiration. The ancient church undoubtedly observed what books were delivered to her by prophets and apostles, and as we have no reason to think, that she suffered herself to be deceived, so there is no ground to suspect any design, on her part, to impose upon us.* It is, then, to those books, which come to us recommended and attested by catholic and uninterrupted tradition, that our attention must be directed.

I shall separately inquire into the grounds on which we receive the books contained in the Old Testament, to the exclusion of all others.

In ascertaining the genuineness of the Christian *Scriptures*, we must employ the same method which we follow, when the genuineness of any other book is the subject of investigation. As it is only by testimony, that this question can be determined, it is necessary to appeal to those, who, from the time when they flourished, were competent to judge, and from their circumstances, felt themselves peculiarly interested in examining the evidence with diligence and caution. The Christian writers of the first ages are the witnesses to whom we must apply for information with respect to the books, which were composed by the immediate disciples and apostles of Christ, and by them were delivered to the world as an authentic account of the Gospel and its Author. The task of searching the records of antiquity hath been undertaken by learned men, and executed with great industry and zeal. The result of their inquiries is, that the books of the New Testament which we now receive, are cited by the early writers as books of Divine authority; that lists were drawn up by private individuals and by councils, in which these books are inserted; that they were read in the churches or religious assemblies of the Christians, not merely as pious and useful compositions, like the epistle of Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas, but as the dictates of inspiration; and that they were carefully distinguished from every spurious production.†

There is no reason to suspect, that the Christians, in the primitive

* We find Cyril of Jerusalem directing those, to whom he addressed his *catechetical discourses*, to learn from the church the inspired books, as distinguished from the *apocryphal*. *Καὶ φιλομαθῶς ἐπύκουθε παρὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, ποίας μὲν εἰσιν αἱ τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλαί, ποίας δὲ τῆς καινῆς· καὶ μοι μὴδὲν τῶν ἀποκρύφων ἀναγίνωσκε.* Cyril: *Cateches.* IV.

† See Lardner's *Credibility of the Gospel History*, Part ii. Jones' *New and Full Method of settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament*.

nes, were careless in an affair of such magnitude, and received books to the canon, or rejected them, at hazard. To insinuate that they offered themselves to be imposed upon by artful men, who wished to make their own compositions pass for a divine revelation, is contrary to all probability; and being a supposition without the slightest evidence, might, with equal propriety, be brought forward to invalidate the strongest testimony in any other case. Whether the Scriptures of the New Testament were inspired or not, their inspiration was by them universally believed. They regarded them as the oracles of heaven, by which they were bound to regulate all their opinions and practices in religion; on which they founded all their hopes of future felicity. The rejection of a single inspired book, and the reception of a forged one, would have equally exposed them, in their own apprehension, to eternal damnation. Their circumstances, too, were peculiar, and contrived to render them cautious and exact in examining the authority of the Scriptures. Their attachment to the religion of Christ exposed them to incredible hardships and sufferings. By embracing it, they stood at the favor of their friends and countrymen, the prospect of wealth and honor, the ease and quiet which the laws secured to the professors of the established faith; and they subjected themselves to contempt, hatred, obloquy, and every thing terrible to human nature. Now, as no man will voluntarily submit to pains and losses, without the hope of recompense, and as their expectations could only be realized, if the religion was true, and their ideas of it were just, we may be assured, that they exercised the utmost care, in distinguishing the genuine records from all such as were forged. They would not stake their all upon uncertainty; they would not risk every thing dear and valuable, without examining the offered security, that they should be ultimate winners.

While these considerations render it highly probable, that the canon of the New Testament was not settled at random, but was framed in consequence of prudent and diligent investigation, we are able to produce some facts, which fully establish this conclusion. We know, that, in the early ages, there were many gospels, and acts, and epistles, and revelations, besides those which we at present receive, claiming to have been written by inspiration; such as the acts of Paul, Andrew, and John, the gospels of Peter, Thomas, and Matthias, the revelation of Peter, with many others, which it would be tedious to mention. We know, likewise, that the authority of a few of the books, which we believe to be inspired, was called in question by some; as the epistles of James and Jude, the second epistle of Peter, the second and third epistle of John, the Revelation, and the epistle to the Hebrews, because no name being prefixed, it was uncertain, who was the writer of it.*

* Euseb. Hist. Lib. iii. cap. 25. In that chapter, Eusebius takes notice of three classes or orders of books; those which were universally acknowledged; those which were called in question by some, though received by many; and those which were manifestly spurious. When enumerating the books, the authority of which was doubted, he does not mention the epistle to the Hebrews; but we learn from the third chapter of the same book, that some rejected it, from the notion that it was not written by Paul. He points out two marks, by which the spurious writings might be distinguished from those which were truly inspired. These are the style, *ἡ τῆς φράσεως χάραξ*; and the sentiment and scope of the matter contained in them, *ἡ γυνή καὶ ἡ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς φερόμενων πραγμάτων*.

But these facts, instead of begetting any suspicion in our minds, with respect to our present Scriptures, serve to confirm us in the belief, that they are authentic. They show, that the church did not rashly give credit to every pretence of inspiration, but examined every such pretence with the most scrupulous care; whence some books, which were really inspired, were not at once received in every part of the Christian world, and others, which bore the names of apostles, being found supposititious, were rejected. A proneness to believe, and a disposition to scepticism are alike unfavorable to the discovery of truth. The primitive church neither received nor rejected all the books, which laid claim to inspiration; but admitted or excluded them, after the evidence on both sides had been maturely considered. A spirit of discrimination was exercised; and we may have the greater confidence, therefore, in the canon which was finally agreed upon.

Similar reasoning may be used with regard to the Old Testament. The Jews were impelled by motives of the most powerful nature, to employ the greatest diligence in examining the grounds, on which the books, which were presented to them as Divine, rested their claim. They entertained the same ideas with the first Christians, respecting the consequences of embracing a false, and rejecting a true revelation. That they did not rashly admit books into their canon, but received or excluded them, according as the evidence of their inspiration was satisfactory or not, we learn from the case of the apocryphal books, of which we shall afterwards speak. The books thus carefully distinguished, they have delivered to the Christian church; and we know that those alone, which are now in our possession, were acknowledged by them in the days of our Saviour. They arrange them in three classes, the law, the prophets, and the holy writings; and to this arrangement he seems to have alluded, when he said to his disciples, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."* There is extant a Greek translation of the Old Testament, known by the name of the Septuagint, or the translation of the Seventy, and made before the Christian æra; in which are the same books that are at present found in the Hebrew copies. Since the time of our Saviour it hath not been in the power of the Jews, though they had been so disposed, to add to, or take from the ancient canon, because the custody of the books hath been transferred to the christian church; nor on the other hand, could

* Luke xxiv. 44. The law comprehends the five books of Moses. The prophets are sub-divided into the former and the latter. The former prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings; the latter prophets are again distinguished into the greater, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; and the lesser, Hosea, Joel, Amos, &c. The Holy Writings are Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles. In the text quoted above, the Psalms are put for the Holy Writings, probably because they were the principal book, or occupied the first place in that division. This classification affords but a poor specimen of the judgment of its authors; for none, it may be presumed, but themselves, would have denied Daniel a place among the prophets, and ranked Ruth rather than Judges or Samuel, among the Holy Writings. Dr. Owen thinks, that, though the general division be ancient, the present arrangement of the books is the work of the post-talmudical doctors, who had a regard, in making it, to the different degrees, or modes of revelation, mentioned in note, page 207. Owen on the Epistle to the Hebrews, vol. i. Exercit. vii.

he Christian church have made any alteration, because the Jews have watched her with a jealous eye, and would not have failed, from malignity as well as zeal, to exclaim against the unhallowed deed. Hence, at this moment, the Jews and we recognise the same books, as containing the revelation which God made to their fathers.

But besides the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which were acknowledged by the Jews, there are some other books, to which the Divine authority hath been assigned; and of which, therefore, it is necessary to take notice, before we leave this part of the subject. The church of Rome, by her last council which met at Trent, hath placed, in the same rank with the law and the prophets, the following apocryphal books: Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, the first and second book of the Maccabees, Baruch, with the additions to Esther and Daniel.* By all protestant churches, however, they are accounted mere human compositions; and, in defence of this judgment, the following reasons may be advanced.

They were not acknowledged to be of Divine authority by the Jews. This circumstance is decisive. If they were not received by those, to whom the oracles of God were committed, and who were never blamed for rejecting any of his oracles, what right has any council, or any individual, under the present dispensation, to assign them a place among the canonical writings? In confirmation of this argument, it may be remarked, that they are not written, either in pure Hebrew, or in that mixed dialect which was spoken after the captivity, but in Greek; and it is highly improbable, that God would deliver any part of revelation to his people in a language which they did not understand.†

They were written after the days of Malachi, in whom, according to the universal testimony of the Jews, the spirit of prophecy ceased, and who not obscurely hints, that after him no prophet should arise, till the Baptist appeared in the spirit and power of Elijah.‡ The vain pretence, in the book of wisdom, that it was written by Solomon, is an additional proof, that it is not inspired, because the pretence is manifestly false. In another part of the book, the writer represents the Israelites as in subjection to their enemies; whereas we know, that, during the reign of Solomon, they enjoyed peace and prosperity.§

No part of them is quoted by Christ or his apostles. Indeed, all the books of the Old Testament are not cited in the New; but we meet with references to most of them; and they are all recognized, as we have seen, under the general titles of the law, the prophets, and the psalms. Is it credible, that, if the apocryphal books were inspired, not a sentiment would be transcribed, not a passage would be produced as an au-

* Vide Canones et Decreta Concili Tridentini, Sess. Quart. There are some other apocryphal books; but those which have been named, are the only ones sanctioned by the council. Its words are worthy to be transcribed. "Si quis libros ipsos integros, cum omnibus suis partibus, (with the stories, no doubt, of the sparrow's dung, which fell on the eyes of Tobit, and of the heart and liver of the fish, the smoke of which frightened the devil,) pro sacris et canonicis non susceperit,—anathema sit."

† It has been supposed, indeed, that Judith, Tobit, and the first book of Maccabees, were originally written in Chaldaic, and afterwards translated into Greek, in which language alone they are now extant; but about this point learned men are not fully agreed. The wisdom of the Son of Sirach is a translation of an imperfect work of his grandfather, written, as he says, in Hebrew. The argument applies, without doubt, to all the other apocryphal books.

‡ Mal. iv. 4, 5, 6.

§ Wisd. ix. 7, 8, xv. 14.

thority from any of them, in the Gospels or Epistles; and that not a single word would be found in all the New Testament, from which it could be inferred, that such books were in existence?

They were not admitted into the canon of Scripture, during the first four centuries; and when they began to be used in the religious assemblies, they were read, as Jerom says, not for the confirmation of doctrine, but for the edification of the common people,—"ad ædificationem plebis, non ad auctoritatem dogmatum confirmandam." Even the council of Carthage, which met in the early part of the fifth century, and placed the apocryphal books among the canonical Scriptures, has been supposed to use the word *canonical* in that loose sense, which was sometimes annexed to it by the fathers, when they applied it to all those books, which might be read in the church.* The same council seems to ascribe Divine authority exclusively to the undisputed Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, when, in a preceding unanimous decree, it warns every man not to act in opposition to the prophets, and the Gospels.†

Not one of the writers, in direct terms, advances a claim to inspiration; and some of them say such things, as amount to an acknowledgment that they were not inspired. The Son of Sirach begs the reader to pardon any faults which he may have committed, in translating the work of his grandfather into Greek.‡ It is acknowledged in two places of the first book of the Maccabees, that there was, at that time, no prophet in Israel.§ The second book is a professed abridgement of five books of Jason of Cyrene;|| and the author concludes with the following words, which are unworthy of a person who wrote by inspiration: "If I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired; but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto."¶

Lastly, the apocryphal books contain fables, lies, and contradictions. The story of Judith is, on good grounds, pronounced to be a fiction. After the return of the Jews from captivity, when it is said to have happened, there was no Nabuchodonoser, king of Assyria, by whose army their land could be invaded. The most remarkable incidents in Tobit are exactly on a level, in point of probability, with the tales which amused our childhood. Antiochus is said, in the first book of Maccabees, to have died in Babylon;** but in the second, to have been slain in the temple of Nanea, in Persia; and again, to have died in a strange country, in the mountains.†† Several other instances of falsehood and contradiction might be added.

Before we close this chapter, it will be proper to make a few remarks, on a question intimately connected with the present subject: namely, whether any inspired books have been lost.

With regard to the New Testament, there is no ground for imagining,

* Vide Codic. Canon. Eccles. Afric. Can. xxiv. The uninspired books, which might be read in the church, were generally called *ecclesiastical*; but as a canon was formed, or a list of such books was drawn up by authority, they sometimes received, in conjunction with the inspired books which were comprehended in the same list, the title of *canonical*.

† Vide Can. v. Universum Concilium dixit. Nemo contra prophetas, nemo contra evangelia facit sine periculo.

‡ Prologue to Ecclesiast. § 1 Maccab. iv. 46. ix 27. || 2 Maccab. ii. 23. ¶ 2 Maccab. xv. 38. ** 1 Maccab. vi. 4, 16. †† 2 Maccab. i. 13—16. ix. 28.

of the books are now wanting of which it originally consisted.* In the Old Testament, we read of several books which are not at present found in the canon; as the book of Jasher, the book of the wars of Jericho, the books of Nathan and Gad, and the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and Iddo the seer concerning genealogies. Before, however, we draw an inference, for which the names of these books are quoted, can be drawn, it must be proved, either that they were all inspired, or that some of them as were written by inspiration, have perished. But it is extremely foolish to conclude, that every book was inspired, because there is a reference in the Scriptures, the opinion of the Jews and many Christian writers is not improbable, that some of the books which we are inquiring, are still extant under other names, constituting part of the books of Samuel and Kings. Our Lord, who directed the Jews with so much fidelity, never charged them with having any part of revelation to perish; and he seems to assure us of the integrity of the Hebrew Scriptures, when he says, "not one jot, nor one tittle, shall pass from the law till all be fulfilled:"† for the law, in this place, agreeably to the sense of the word in many other places, is not the five books of Moses alone, but the whole system of laws and precepts, which had been delivered to the church; or, as it is called more distinctly in the preceding verse, the law and the prophets. If we believe in a providence, vigilant, active, and almighty, we can no more allow ourselves to think, that it would permit any part of revelation, which was intended to be a complete and perpetual rule, to be lost, than that it would suffer the light of the sun to be diminished. The productions of human genius and eloquence may perish, but the very names of their authors be forgotten; but the oracles of God shall last, till all the purposes for which they were given, be accomplished.

CHAPTER III.

The Inspiration of the New Testament.

We have spoken, in the preceding chapter, of the canonical Scriptures, or those writings which the church hath recognized, as constituting the only rule of faith and manners to the professors of the Christian religion. We do not mean, however, that our faith in them is founded on the care with which she hath discriminated them from other writings not of inspiration, and the decrees which she hath published in their behalf.

It is a paradox, which none could believe, but those who are prejudiced to digest the monstrous figment of transubstantiation, that the

in Colossians, chap. iv. 16, some have inferred, that Paul wrote an epistle to the Laodiceans, which, it is pretended, is still in existence. But that verse speaks of an epistle, not to the Laodiceans, but from Laodicea; and the epistle to the Laodiceans which bears the name of Paul, is a mere cento, a thing patched up of sentences from his other epistles, without any determinate end. Vide Witsium in Vita Pauli, l. v. 18.

Scriptures derive all their authority from the church, which derives all her authority from them. On what grounds, it might be asked, does the church assert their inspiration? If it should be answered, that the present church is possessed of traditional evidence from the testimony of the ancient fathers and doctors; ascending through the intermediate ages, to the time when the books were first presented to the world, we ask again, by what considerations the primitive church was induced to receive them as inspired? The evidence which satisfied the first Christians, may satisfy us; and it is not reasonable to demand, that less should suffice us, while our interest is equally great as theirs in ascertaining the truth. They were too wise to submit, in so important a matter, to bare authority, or simple affirmation. Some of the proofs, indeed, which were presented to them, being transient facts, cannot be subjected to the test of our senses; but, if it can be shown, that such facts actually took place, the impression made upon our minds, though it may not equal in vivacity the impression made upon theirs, will be sufficiently strong to produce full conviction. The disadvantage, which may be supposed to arise from our not having witnessed the facts, is compensated by a new species of evidence, which is the result of the progress of time, and the evolution of events; but which it was impossible, that those, to whom the sacred books were first presented, could enjoy. The intelligent reader will easily perceive, that I allude to the evidence of prophecy.

The natural order of the books requires, that I should, in the first place, bring arguments in support of the inspiration of the Old Testament. But though this method might, with propriety, be adopted, and, by proving the inspiration of the Jewish, we would pave the way for proving that of the Christian Scriptures; yet it will afterwards appear, that, by beginning with the New Testament, we shall more easily and effectually accomplish our purpose.

In favor of the inspiration of the New Testament, there are three proofs, which I shall illustrate in this, and the following chapter. The first is drawn from the credit, which the verbal testimony of the apostles concerning Jesus Christ, obtained in the world; the second, from the reception of their writings; and the third, from the contents of those writings.

I. The inspiration of the New Testament may be inferred from the credit which the testimony concerning Jesus Christ, emitted by the writers in the course of their public ministry obtained. The design of the present argument is to show, from the reception of their testimony, that they were accredited, attested messengers from God; and, by a natural and obvious inference, to demonstrate the Divine authority of their writings. Its force will be more fully perceived from the subsequent illustration.

The apostles were competent witnesses of those facts which they attested, and on which the Christian religion is founded. Their testimony did not relate to certain abstract points, in forming a judgment of which, they might have been misled by the sophistry of others, or erred through their own inadvertence or incapacity; nor to events, which had happened before their birth, or in a distant region of the earth, and of which, therefore, they might have received false information. It respected facts which they had witnessed with their eyes, and with their ears.

They had lived with Christ, during the whole time of his ministry : they had heard all his discourses, and seen all his wonderful works. The advantages which they enjoyed for ascertaining the truth of those things which they published to others, are pointed out by one of them in the following words : " That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life ; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the father, and was manifested unto us :) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."* In certain cases, we refuse to give credit, even to a person of unimpeachable integrity, because he hath not had a sufficient opportunity to acquire a thorough acquaintance with his subject : but if any man be disposed to call in question the testimony of the apostles, his doubts must spring from some other source than a well-founded suspicion of partial, or inaccurate intelligence. What they saw and heard, they were fully qualified to relate.

The honesty of the apostles, in the character of witnesses to the truth of the christian religion, is not less evident than their competency. If none of those motives, by which men are induced to bear false witness, can be conceived to have influenced them ; and if no satisfactory reason can be assigned for their conduct, but a conviction of the truth, he must be highly uncandid and unreasonable, who suspects their veracity. They were not prompted by a spirit of ambition, to form a scheme of immortalizing their names, by introducing a system of faith, to be established on the ruins of every other religion. Such a scheme was not likely to occur to persons so mean and illiterate ; and though their views had been more aspiring than their condition warrants us to suppose, they would have been deterred from seriously thinking of it, by the obvious impossibility of carrying it into effect. They were not stimulated by avarice ; for they who had already forsaken all to follow their Master, could not hope to gain wealth in exchange, by a religion which taught men to despise it, and which few of the rich were likely to embrace. It was not the love of ease which allured them to submit to labors which had no interruption, to persecution in every city, to the scorn of the world, to imprisonment and death. They cannot be conceived to have acted from a mere wish to impose upon mankind ; because the deceivers would not have contrived the purest, the most sublime, the most benevolent religion, which the world ever saw ; a religion, by which all falsehood and imposture are forbidden under the penalty of everlasting torments. In short, to what ever motive we attribute their conduct, no rational account of it can be given, till we resort to the supposition, that they were fully convinced of the truth of what they declared. In this case, we can conceive them to have renounced all temporal goods and to have exposed themselves to all temporal ills, from an ardent and generous desire to communicate to their fellow men the inestimable blessings of the Gospel ; supported under all their toils and sufferings, by the assurance of supernatural aid, and animated by the hope of a glorious recompense. But if their testimony was not true, their conduct is inexplicable, unless they were madmen or enthusiasts ; and of either of these charges, the system which they taught, and the whole of

* 1 John i. 1, 3.

their deportment afford an easy and complete refutation. Madmen could not have devised a religion so full of wisdom and order, in which duties grow so naturally out of principles, and the various parts so admirably harmonize. Enthusiasts could not have talked so rationally on subjects so much calculated, as several topics in the Gospel are, to inflame the imagination; nor have delivered a rule of life so well adapted to the circumstances of mankind, and so far removed from any thing excessive or overstrained; nor have displayed zeal tempered with so much prudence; nor have acted, on many trying occasions, with such uniform dignity and unruffled composure.

Notwithstanding these considerations, however, which might have satisfied those, whom the apostles addressed, of their integrity, and are sufficient to put to silence the lying lips of infidelity, which brings against them a charge of imposture, I hesitate not to assert, that their testimony would not have been believed, if they had not exhibited such evidence as demonstrated, that they acted by a Divine commission; and, by a necessary consequence, may convince us, that their writings were inspired.

Let us attend to some of the principal facts which they attested, and of the doctrines which they founded upon them. They taught, that Jesus Christ, a man born of an obscure mother, who had lived in poverty, and died an ignominious death, was the Son of the Most High God; that having risen from the dead, he had ascended to heaven, and was now constituted the Lord of angels and men; that to believe in him was the only way to obtain the favor of God, and the enjoyment of eternal life: that men of all nations were bound to forsake the religion of their fathers, and embrace his Gospel; and that at the close of time, he would appear in the clouds of heaven, raise the dead from their graves, and judge all mankind, according to their works. It may be added, that on these doctrines they reared a system of moral precepts, which, however agreeable to right reason, must be acknowledged to be extremely uninviting to human nature, as governed by those propensities and inclinations, which are felt and acknowledged in every age, and in every climate.

It is impossible to conceive a religion more repugnant than the Christian to the prejudices and expectations of both Jews and Gentiles; of the Jews, who, misled by the figurative language of prophecy, which they interpreted under the influence of carnal affections, looked for a temporal Messiah, who would subdue their enemies and put them in possession of wealth and dominion; of the Greeks, who sought after wisdom, and despised every doctrine, which was not agreeable to the tenets of their philosophy, and adorned with the beauties of eloquence. Was it probable, that men would renounce opinions and practices, rendered venerable by the sanction of their ancestors for many ages: and abandon the religions, to which they had been inspired with an early attachment, at the call of a few unknown and unlettered persons, who published doctrines so abhorrent to all their ideas, and void of apparent credibility? Was it probable, that they would embrace a religion, which held out no prospect of worldly advantage; but, on the contrary, while it required from them the practice of the most painful duties, taught them to reckon upon the scorn and ill-usage of the world as their present reward? Their conversion was so highly improbable, that a man of

prudence and sagacity would have thought himself fully warranted to predict complete disappointment, as the issue of the labors of the apostles. Yet we know, that their endeavors to turn the world to the faith, were crowned with the most astonishing success. Myriads of Jews and Gentiles, notwithstanding the scandal of his cross, acknowledged the Divinity and Messiahship of Jesus; and became his disciples at the risk of every thing, which is accounted dear and valuable among men.

How, then, shall we account for so singular an event? Either we must suppose that mankind, in that age, were not governed by the same motives, which are observed to influence them in every other age; or we must conclude, that the apostles exhibited such evidence of the truth of the Gospel, as perfectly satisfied them, and triumphed over their prejudices. And what else could that evidence be, but the miracles recorded in the New Testament? The first preachers of Christianity could not demonstrate its truth, by the principles of reason; and its intrinsic excellence was not of a kind to be perceived and relished, at least in the first instance, by those whom they addressed. Some proof of easy apprehension, some evidence which would strike the dullest, and convince the most prejudiced, was requisite; and of these qualities, the evidence of miracles is eminently possessed. If the miracles be denied, their success is altogether inexplicable, and as Chrysostom says, 'If without miracles they persuaded the world, this is the greatest miracle of all.' The denial of the miracles is the more unreasonable, because, while a certain effect is allowed to have been produced, the only cause which could satisfactorily account for it, is not admitted.

I beg the reader to bestow a little attention on this matter. By a miracle, I mean a work, which no man could perform, unless God were with him; a work superior, or contrary to the laws of nature, which God, or some being commissioned by him, performs, when certain words are spoken, or some sign is given by the person, whose character and doctrine the miracle is meant to attest. I acknowledge, that we ought not rashly to believe, that miracles have been wrought, because such events are out of the ordinary course of nature, and abstractly considered, therefore, are improbable; and because the most fatal consequences might flow from admitting, without sufficient evidence, that a person is a messenger from God. But such circumstances may accompany the report of a miracle, as shall render it absolutely unreasonable not to believe it. If, for example, it be said to have produced a change in human affairs, which change we find to have actually taken place; and if the change be of such a nature, that no other cause was sufficient to effect it, the truth of the miracle can no more be called in question, than the state of things founded upon it. Now this is exactly the case of the miracles of the apostles. The most astonishing revolution in the history of mankind, is said to have been accomplished by them, or by their doctrine, as attested and confirmed by them; the fact itself is indisputable; and the supposition of their miracles is the only theory which will account for it, in a satisfactory manner. All the other causes, to which the progress of Christianity hath been ascribed, are manifestly inadequate. Should their miracles appear improbable, when viewed by themselves, they are probable, and even highly credible, when considered in connection with their success: or rather we may pronounce them to be certain. In the language of philosophy, they are the only

principle, which is sufficient to explain the phenomenon. In fact we are reduced to this alternative, either to believe that the greatest revolution in the world was effected without any adequate cause ; or to admit their miracles, which afford a simple and satisfactory explanation of it.

If then the apostles, as the case obliges to grant, were endowed with a power of performing miraculous works, God testified his approbation of them in their public capacity. Miracles were the seals of heaven appended to their commission ; tokens, that they were its friends and favorites ; signs, which not only awakened the attention, but proved that they were supernaturally assisted. It follows, that their doctrine was from God ; for nothing can be more certain, than that he would not have given them a power to control the laws of nature ; or to speak more conformably to truth, that he would not himself have controlled the laws of nature at their command, that they might successfully propagate lies in his name. God would not have given the visions of their brain the highest attestation which he can give to his own oracles. What they spoke, therefore, God spoke by them, as what is said by an ambassador, in conformity to his instructions, is understood to be said by the king, his master. But if the doctrine which they preached was Divine, their writings are of equal authority, not only because they contain a summary of the doctrine, but because the same miracles, which attested their sermons, attested likewise their Gospels and epistles. Their miracles attested all their instructions, whether verbal or written. They proved their authority in general, to make a revelation to mankind ; and consequently proved, that in whatever form, or by whatever means, they made it, by the tongue or by the pen, by spoken or by written discourses, they were alike entitled to credit.

It would discover caprice and childishness to draw a line of distinction between their discourses and their writings ; and to say that the former were inspired, but that the latter were the productions of their unassisted faculties. We must either deny, or admit the inspiration of both. It is evidently absurd to suppose, that God gave them his commission, when they were to preach, but withdrew it, when they were to write for the benefit of all succeeding generations ; or that he enabled them to work miracles to convince us that they were his messengers, and yet did not guide them by his Spirit, in committing their message to writing.

Surely, if it was of importance, that the apostles should be preserved from all error in preaching the Gospel, it was of more importance, that they should be under infallible direction in framing those books, from which men, in all ages and countries, would draw their notions of the Christian religion. An error in one of their discourses might have misled a few hundreds or thousands, and could have been retracted on another occasion ; but an error in their books would have been productive of the most pernicious consequences to the end of the world, and could not have been corrected without a new revelation. Besides, as no man can assign a reason, why the attestation of their Divine commission by miracles should be supposed to have terminated, when they ceased to speak and began to write, so no man in his senses, will entertain an idea of revelation so perfectly ridiculous. All the miracles, then, which were wrought in confirmation of the Gospel, must be considered as having been wrought in confirmation of the books in which the Gospel is recorded. God hath set his seal to them. He hath assured us, that they contain his

word, and nothing but his word ; and by consequence, that the persons who wrote them were inspired.

This reasoning I am disposed to think, would not be disputed by a candid infidel. It is probable, that if he could be once thoroughly convinced, that the writers of the New Testament wrought miracles, he would acknowledge, notwithstanding some remaining difficulties, their books to be inspired. It is disputed, however, by Socinians, who, granting that the apostles performed miracles in confirmation of their doctrine, deny the inspiration of their writings. I wonder, if the opinions of these men be just, for what purpose the miracles were wrought. If a miracle, besides proving that the person who works it, is a messenger from God, do not farther prove, that he is so disposed and assisted by a Divine influence upon his mind, as to relate his message with unerring exactness, it seems to me to be no better than a prodigy or strange sight, calculated only to surprise or to amuse us. I am not able to conceive any thing more irrational, and I will add, more derogatory to the honor of God, than to assert, that he performed a long series of miracles to establish the truth of a revelation, of which, however, we have only a mere human record, interspersed, as the above gentlemen say, with false reasoning, prejudiced opinions, and wrong interpretations of passages of the Old Testament. What did the miracles attest ? The religion of Christ. What is the religion of Christ ? Truly it is not very easy to tell, for we have no infallible account of it ; but we must guess at it, as well as we can, from the books of the first preachers, who were honest men, indeed, but fallible ; and who have been convicted by Dr. Priestley of such ignorance of logic, as sometimes to have drawn conclusions which the premises would not warrant. This, reader, is *rational* Christianity ; but if all this be true, the miracles of the Gospel are proofs, that God hath done many things in vain. There hath been a waste of wonders to demonstrate the truth of a revelation which might have been, and, if we will give credit to some confident assertions, hath been corrupted by the very persons who were employed to publish it ; while by a single miracle more, the inspiration of the publishers, the integrity and purity of the revelation, would have been secured ; and thus there would have been an end worthy of God, for which the other miracles were wrought.

This, then, is the first argument for the inspiration of the New Testament ; and it seems to be conclusive. But as it is of the utmost importance, that our minds should be well established in the belief of the Divine authority of the Scriptures, I shall prove this point in a manner somewhat different.

II. The reception of the books of the New Testament by those to whom they were first presented, is a proof of their inspiration. In order to place this argument in a convincing light, it will be necessary to premise some observations respecting the persons by whom the books were written, and the claim advanced in them.

In the first place, it is certain that the books of the New Testament were written by the persons whose names they bear. Of this fact it is necessary that we should be thoroughly convinced, because if any suspicion should remain in our minds, that they are the productions of a later age than that of the apostles, the force of the present argument would be entirely destroyed. That the books of the New Testament

were written by the same persons whose names are prefixed to them, is proved by the same sort of evidence, which is employed to show, that any other book, written in a former age, was the work of the person accounted its author. How do we know, for example, that the books which bear the name of Cicero, Plato, Aristotle, or any other ancient philosopher, were really composed by them, but by the uniform testimony of all succeeding ages? In the same manner we know, that the Gospels of Matthew and John, and the Epistles of Paul and Peter, are genuine. All ages have concurred in ascribing them to these persons. They are said to have been the authors, not only by private individuals, but by councils solemnly assembled to decide on this point. We have the testimony of those who had the best means of ascertaining the truth, the Christian writers who flourished immediately, or soon after their death. Nay, there is more complete evidence, that the books of the New Testament were written by those men, to whom they have been always attributed, than that any other ancient books, those of the Old Testament excepted, were composed by their reputed authors. Not only are they much more frequently quoted than other books; but more persons felt themselves interested in ascertaining that they were genuine, than in knowing the author of any other writing. It was a matter of importance only to a few, or rather of no real importance to any body, whether the works of Plato and Cicero were composed by these philosophers; but the present peace, and the eternal salvation of thousands and millions, the determination of innumerable controversies, and the regulation of the faith and practice of the church in all ages and nations, depended on the certain knowledge, that the New Testament was written by the apostles and disciples of Christ. There is not, therefore, any historical fact, in favor of which the evidence is more ample and satisfactory. We cannot doubt of it, but on such grounds as would equally justify us in discrediting those past events, which are most fully authenticated, and about which it would be deemed a symptom of derangement to be sceptical.

I observe, in the second place, that the writers of the New Testament assert, that they wrote by inspiration. Their own inspiration, indeed is not affirmed in express terms by the evangelists; but such things are said in the Gospels, as may be fairly understood to imply it. They tell us, that Christ promised to send "the Spirit of Truth to guide his disciples into all truth," and "to bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them."* Now, by recording these promises, the sacred historians not obscurely insinuate, that it was in virtue of their accomplishment, or by the promised assistance of the Spirit, that they were enabled to give a faithful narrative of the words and works of their Master.† In the other books, the claim of inspiration is brought forward in unequivocal language, and is often repeated. This is plain

* John xvi. 13. xiv. 26.

† This reasoning, it may be objected, will apply only to Matthew and John, who were apostles. But Mark and Luke were companions of the apostles, engaged in the same work with them, and hence we have every reason to believe, favored with the same extraordinary assistance. The church had always considered them as men endowed with apostolical gifts. The authority of their Gospels was never questioned; and it was a received opinion among the ancients, that they were sanctioned by apostles; that of Luke by Paul, and that of Mark by Peter. Vid. Euseb. Hist. Lib. ii. 14. iii. 4. vi. 25.

om the sentence with which the epistles usually begin. The writers style themselves apostles of Christ; a title which signifies that they were his messengers, who spoke in his name and by his authority. In the body of the epistles, there are many passages, in which the same thing is still more explicitly asserted. Paul affirms, in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, that "the things, which he and his brethren taught, God had revealed to them by his Spirit;" that "they had the mind of Christ;" and that "the things which he wrote, were the commandments of the Lord;"* in the epistle to the Galatians, that "the Gospel, which he preached, he had received by the revelation of Jesus Christ;"† and in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, that "he who despised the things which he taught, despised not man but God, who had given to him his Holy Spirit."‡ Peter places "the commandments delivered by the apostles," in the same rank with "the words of the Holy Prophets;" and classes the writing of Paul with the "other Scriptures."|| John represents his own inspiration and that of his brethren as so manifest, that every man, who knew God, would listen to them. "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."§ These are not all the passages which might be quoted; but they may suffice as a specimen. It cannot, therefore, be said, that the inspiration of the books of the New Testament is an idea, which succeeding ages have devised and propagated; for it is stated expressly and repeatedly by the writers themselves.

From these two particulars I infer, that the reception of the books of the New Testament, by those to whom they were addressed, is a proof, that the claim of inspiration advanced in them is true. It is acknowledged, that, in different countries, certain books have been received as inspired, though they were fabricated by artful and designing men. But either these books were imposed upon mankind, in an age when they were too ignorant and too credulous to be able, or willing to examine their pretensions; or they obtained credit by the arts and authority of civil rulers, who were themselves, perhaps, the dupes of imposture, or found it their interest, that their subjects should be deceived. Both these causes contributed to make the Koran of Mahomet pass for a Divine revelation. If the Arabians had been enlightened by science and united in one great polished society, instead of being divided into a number of independent, barbarous tribes; if the light of learning and philosophy had shined as brightly on the neighboring nations, as it formerly did; and if no means had been employed to convert mankind to his religion, but evidence and persuasion; his claim to the character of a prophet would have been instantly rejected with violence or with scorn; his religion would have scarcely spread beyond the limits of his own family; and the page of history would not have been stained with the name of the profligate impostor. The books of the New Testament were published in an enlightened age; were addressed to the Jews, who investigated, with scrupulous diligence, every pretension to inspiration, and to the Greeks, who were disposed to treat all such pretensions with contempt; and were the writings of

* 1 Cor. ii. 9—13. 16. xiv. 37.

† 2 Pet. iii. 2. 15, 16.

‡ Gal. i. 11, 12.

§ 1 John, iv. 6.

¶ 1 Thess. iv. 8.

men, who, instead of possessing rank and influence, were accounted the *offscouring* of the world. The doctrines contained in them were neither calculated to flatter the passions, nor recommended by the charms of eloquence. The composition was simple and homely; and the religion which they taught, was contradictory to the prejudices of the Gentile and the Jew, and hostile to the vices of both.

By what means, then, did the claim of these books to inspiration come to be admitted? What induced those, to whom we were presented, to recognise them as Divine, to sacrifice their preconceived opinions to their authority, to submit to the rigid discipline and the severe restraints which they imposed? To imagine that they admitted the claim without being satisfied of its truth, would be highly irrational. It was not an indolent assent to their Divinity which was demanded. The acknowledgment of it was not a matter of mere speculation, but involved the most serious practical consequences; for by embracing the Gospel they exposed themselves to the contempt and persecution of the world. All their interests were staked, all their hopes depended, on the truth of their inspiration. Now, I know of no conceivable way in which they could be satisfied, but by seeing incontrovertible proof of Divine assistance afforded to the writers in the composition of their books. The suspicion of some artifice employed by the apostles and evangelists to make their own inventions pass for a revelation from heaven, is banished by their known simplicity; nor could any artifice have succeeded so generally as the inspiration of their books was acknowledged. It was not in one place or by one set of men only that they were received; but among, heathens as well as Jews, at Athens and at Rome, and in all the chief cities of the empire, by the rich and by the poor, by the great and by the mean, by the wise and by the unwise, they were regarded with reverence, as the oracles of God. The reception of the books, then, viewed in connexion with their claim to inspiration, is a proof that the men of the apostolic age witnessed miracles performed by the writers, for by miracles alone could that claim be established; and, if they actually wrought miracles, the seal of heaven, as we proved under the first argument, was affixed to their writings, and their Divine authority is placed beyond dispute. Thus we are again conducted to the conclusion, that the miracles recorded or alluded to in the New Testament, were really performed; and we can demand no better reason for receiving any book as a revelation from God, than his public and explicit testimony in its favor.

To set this argument in a still more convincing light, it may be observed, that the writers of the New Testament assert, in the presence of those to whom their books were delivered, that they had given undeniable evidence of their inspiration. The Gospels and the Acts declare, that the apostles were endowed with a power of working miracles, for the express purpose of verifying their commission, and demonstrating their right to instruct mankind in faith and practice. Paul in one of his epistles to the Corinthians, says to them, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds."* Other instances of the same kind might be quoted.† Now for the illustration of this argument, let me ask the

* 2 Cor. xii. 12.

† Gal. iii. 2. 1 Thess. i. 5. Heb. ii. 3, 4.

following question. If a man should affirm that he was inspired, and for proof, should affirm farther that he could work miracles, and had wrought them before the eyes of the persons whom he addressed, would they allow his claim to inspiration, if they had seen no miracles performed by him? No: they would reject him with abhorrence and contempt, as a vile and impudent imposter. He had appealed to evidence, which every man was capable of examining, and which, the senses of every man told him, had failed. It follows, then, that if they should admit his claim, others, who were not present, would be warranted to conclude that they had witnessed his miracles; and, therefore, though they had not with their own eyes seen the proof, would act rationally in believing him to be inspired. It was impossible, that in such circumstances, his pretensions should have been recognised, had the evidence, in which he himself rested their truth, not been produced. Let us apply this example to the case before us. The writers of the sacred books tell those to whom they delivered them, not only that they could work, but that they had wrought miracles, to prove their own inspiration. The reader is apprized, that miracles attested them to be apostles, or inspired messengers of Christ; and it is needless to repeat the arguments which show, that the writings of such men ought to be considered as Divine. By those persons, the inspiration of their books was acknowledged; and does it not unavoidably follow, that they had been spectators of their miracles? For, if no miracles had been performed, would they not have treated them and their arrogant pretensions with scorn and indignation? The reception of the books in such circumstances amounts to a public and express declaration on the part of the most unexceptionable judges, that the writers had claimed no power of which they had not shown themselves to be possessed.

There is yet another view which may be taken of this argument. Not only do the apostles affirm that they had wrought miracles in the presence of those to whom they wrote; but they speak to those persons as themselves possessed of miraculous gifts. The reader may consult the twelfth and the fourteenth chapters of the first epistle to the Corinthians. The same writer signifies to the Galatians, that they had received the "Spirit" by the hearing of faith, probably meaning his miraculous gifts;* and he warns the Hebrews against rejecting the Gospel, which had been confirmed to them by miracles and "gifts of the Holy Ghost;" or supernatural endowments conferred on those Jewish believers. An impostor, pretending, to be furnished with the power of working miracles, might impose upon a staring, ignorant multitude, by some juggling tricks; but if he should tell the same multitude, credulous and undiscerning as they are, that he had imparted that power to them, every man's consciousness would give the lie to the pretence. Finding, then, that Paul speaks to the members of some Christian churches as possessing, and exercising, and even, in some instances, abusing supernatural gifts; and that his epistles were, notwithstanding such language, received not only as the letters of a man in his senses, but as Divinely inspired, we have the most complete evidence, that such extraordinary powers were really enjoyed. Had the Corinthians, or the Galatians known, that the gift of miracles or of

* Gal. iii. 2.

tongues had been communicated to no person in their societies, they would have treated him and his writings with derision. But now it being manifest that miraculous gifts were common in the primitive church, we perceive a good reason, why the writings of the apostles were then received, and should still be regarded by us, as Divine. There cannot be a surer evidence that a person is invested with a commission from heaven, or a clearer attestation of the truth and authority of his instructions, than his being empowered to communicate to his adherents the same supernatural qualifications, which have been bestowed on himself. The miraculous gifts were imparted by the ministry of the apostles; and were express testimonies, therefore, that their doctrine, whether spoken or written, was from God. They followed the reception of the Gospel, preached by these ambassadors of Christ; and were usually given by the imposition of their hands.*

By this, and the preceding argument, we are furnished with the most decisive evidence, that the Christian Scriptures, at the time when they were published, were recognized by God as exhibiting a revelation of his will; and in submitting to them, therefore, as the rule of our faith, we follow no cunningly devised fable.

CHAPTER IV.

The same subject continued.

THE arguments, in the last chapter, respected the external evidence of the inspiration of the New Testament. In this chapter, I shall consider the internal proof of the same point which may be collected from its contents. And, surely, it is no less manifest, that a book hath been drawn up by supernatural assistance, when its sentiments and composition transcend the known abilities of the writer, and are even superior to every thing human, than when such works are performed by him as show, that he enjoys the presence, and acts by the authority of God.

III. The books of the New Testament could not have contained such things as they do contain, if the writers had not been inspired. We appeal to the writings themselves for evidence that they are not, and could not be the productions of the persons, to whom they are ascribed, nor indeed of any mortal whatever. The argument for their inspiration, derived from their matter, comprehends these particulars,—the character of Christ,—the system of doctrine,—and the prophecies found in them.

1. The character of Christ, drawn by the writers of the New Testament, may be considered in the first place.

To us who may have been accustomed to read and hear descriptions of it from our earliest years, his character is perfectly familiar; and on that account makes a less powerful impression on our minds. But let us suppose a man, for the first time, to open the New Testament, and

* Acts viii. 14—17. xix. 6.

peruse the account given of our Saviour by the evangelists. It is beyond doubt, that he would be filled with astonishment at a character so different from all that he had ever witnessed, all that he had ever heard of, all that the human imagination, so fertile in forming new combinations, had ever portrayed. The idea of an incarnate God, would strongly excite his attention; and while, with a mixture of curiosity and awe, he contemplated an object at once so new and so grand, he would be surprised and pleased at the manner in which he is described. Had the character of Christ been a fiction of the sacred writers, a creature of their own fancy, they would have debased his Divinity by attributing to him the passions and culpable weakness of mortals; or they would have exalted his human nature too high by majestic and overpowering displays of his divinity. It would have been impossible for them to avoid either of these extremes. They would have been afraid, on the one hand, of rendering, the truth of his godhead suspected, if they had assigned to him any of the peculiar properties of man; and, on the other, of giving ground to call in question his humanity, if they had represented him as possessed of the peculiar attributes of God. There was a difficulty in the case, from which the greatest dexterity could not have extricated them. But there is this singularity in his character, as drawn by the evangelists, that, while he is elevated above all men by the uniform dignity of his behavior, the wisdom of his discourses, and his miracles, which showed that all nature was obedient to his will; he is at the same time exhibited as subject to the sinless infirmities of our nature, and influenced by its innocent passions. We see the unexpected and most cordial union of majesty and condescension, of the grandeur of a God, and the mild virtues and tender affections of a man. Such a character commands at once our reverence and our love, our homage and our confidence; and is exactly suited to the idea of a person, who unites in himself two natures so different as the Divine and the human. And the character is supported throughout in a great diversity of scenes, and on the most trying occasions, in so much that, in whatever point of view we contemplate it, we perceive the most perfect accordance of all its parts.

While we necessarily admire this character, let us remember that it was drawn by persons confessedly illiterate; by men of ordinary talents, who had never, it is probable, read any book but the Old Testament, and were perfectly ignorant of the art of composition. Whence, then, did they succeed so well in giving a description of an incarnate God; while, I will venture to assert, the most inventive and eloquent genius, if he had made the attempt, with no other assistance than what imagination supplied, would have missed the happy medium, and have elevated him too high, or depressed him too low? How did they ever think of such a character at all, of which no model, nor even the faintest resemblance could be found in the history of mankind? I know of only one answer to these questions, namely, that they actually saw such a character; or, that Jesus Christ really appeared, and was such a person as they represent him to have been. As the very uncommon portrait, which they have drawn, is certainly not a likeness of any individual, who lived in a former age, and possesses such features as convince us,

that it could not be the work of fancy, we infer that they painted from the life.*

If, then, there was such a person as Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God in human nature, it may be confidently inferred, that, his apostles were inspired, not only because he was able to give but because he expressly promised to give them, the Holy Ghost. He who admits in general the account of our Saviour's life and character to be true, must from a regard to consistency, admit the whole of it, and by consequence the promise of the mission of the Spirit, made to his disciples. Few, I believe, who allow the truth of the history, will dispute this inference from it; and, if we give credit to the evangelists in detailing the character of their Master, no reason can be assigned for calling in question their veracity, when they relate any of his sayings. It would indeed be difficult, if not impossible, for any considerate man to persuade himself, that, though the Son of God came into the world to declare the counsels of heaven, yet no person was qualified, in an extraordinary manner, to give a narrative of the most astonishing event in the annals of time; but that it was left to the uncertain choice and unassisted ability of some honest, but weak and unlearned men, to transmit an account of it to succeeding generations. It is strange, that a thing so incredible should be believed by those pretended christians alone, who profess such reverence for the authority of reason, that they will not believe even God himself, till his words have received the sanction of its approbation.

Under this branch of the general argument for the inspiration of the New Testament, founded on the *matter* contained in it, may be proper to introduce a few observations on the *manner* in which some parts of it are written. The evangelists, in relating the history of Christ, have occasion to speak of the most astonishing facts; his miraculous conception; the wonders which he wrought in calming the fury of the winds and waves, raising the dead, casting out devils, and curing all sorts of diseases; his transfiguration on the mount; the preternatural eclipse of the sun at his death, the rending of the rocks, and the opening of the graves; his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension to heaven. Might it not have been expected, that, in recording such events, they would have given vent to those feelings of admiration, which they are so well calculated to awaken, and have described them in the most glowing expressions? The subject was interesting, and well fitted to produce those strong emotions, which naturally communicate something of their own character to our language. Yet they are related in the most simple manner, without any note of admiration, without any comment, without any attempt to set them off, or recommend them to the attention of the reader. This mode of writing did not proceed from insensibility, which in their circumstances would have indicated a degree of callousness or torpor, that could only have resulted from absolute stupidity. They inform us, that they were astonished, when they saw the miracles of Jesus; but they write of them, without any expression

* If it should be said, that they borrowed their ideas of his character from the Old Testament, it might be answered, that nothing is more improbable, than that their notions of the Messiah should have been so different from those of their countrymen, who read the same Scriptures; and after all, the question would recur, From what source were the ideas of the writers of the Old Testament derived?

ishment. How can their coolness be accounted for? Is it not that in writing their narratives they were guided by a different ~~and~~ their own; that they wrote not as they thought and felt ~~was~~, but as they were directed by another, who kept their ~~s~~ and feelings under control? The influence of the Holy Ghost ~~was~~ in restraining them from mixing their own sentiments ~~ideas~~ with the relation, and in leading them to give a simple ~~set~~ of facts without any embellishment, that our faith in Christ ~~rest~~ entirely on the evidences of his Divine dignity and mission, ~~but~~ not, in any degree, be owing to human wisdom and elo-

~~quency~~ be agreeable to the reader, and it will place the argument in ~~clearer~~ light, to take notice of some other particulars.

And did a person of such virtue as Jesus Christ appear in our world; ~~his~~ virtue wear so amiable an aspect; never was it calculated to ~~make~~ interesting an impression on the heart. His character was at ~~perfect~~ and attractive. His meekness and gentleness, his affability ~~indulgence~~, his patience, his benevolence, his generous love, ~~had~~ a soft and pleasing lustre over the severer virtues, which were ~~not~~ in his conduct. An ancient philosopher fondly imagined, that ~~he~~ were incarnate, all men would be charmed with her beauty. ~~But~~ at least have expected, that those who conversed with the Son ~~of~~ in whom, if I may be allowed the expression, virtue was em- ~~bodyed~~ would have been ravished beyond measure with his excellencies, ~~and~~ had have celebrated them in the warmest strains of commendation. ~~In~~ narrative, indeed, the lovely features of his character are ex- ~~posed~~ to the greatest advantage. But this is done by representing them ~~in~~ native simplicity, without paint or decoration of any kind; and ~~yet~~ ~~whereas~~, while they give a full detail of his virtues, pass on without ~~a~~ single reflection.

And did any person deserve to meet with such good treatment as ~~Christ~~ Christ; and never was any person so harshly and cruelly used. ~~His~~ deeds were watched and misconstrued; his most beneficent deeds ~~by~~ the malignity of his countrymen, transformed into crimes; and ~~on~~ the blackest dye were laid to his charge. Was it not natural ~~for~~ ~~the~~ ~~people~~, faithful and affectionate, to enter with ardor into the cause ~~of~~ Master, and to repel with indignation calumnies which they ~~originated~~ originate in malice? Could we have been surprised, if their ~~revel~~ had burst forth into vehement exclamation against the injus- ~~tice~~ ~~of~~ his accusers; and laying aside the language of ceremony, which ~~had~~ in most cases the language of falsehood, had bestowed on them ~~for~~ conduct, the names and epithets, which, we are sure, they de- ~~re~~ ~~serve~~. Yet they leave their Master to vindicate himself; and even ~~he~~ holds his peace, they trust his apology to the silent and irresis- ~~tible~~ ~~sequence~~ of his conduct. They speak of his enemies with as much ~~as~~, as if they had done him no injury; and the dark shade of their ~~is~~ is not deepened by a single stroke of their pencil.

And was there an event so astonishing as the death of Christ. The ~~not~~ have sometimes fallen victims to the injustice of the world, or ~~in~~ own generosity. But who is this sufferer? Is he not greater

* West on the Resurrection, 2 edit. p. 355.

than all men? Is he not the Creator of the universe; and does not all nature, accordingly, pay him homage in his sufferings? The most heroic love, therefore, is unworthy to be named with the love of Jesus.—On this topic, the evangelists, full of admiration and gratitude, might have bestowed all the coloring of imagery, and all the riches of language. It was a topic more calculated than any other to gratify their own feelings, and to interest strangers in behalf of their Master. What tender and overpowering descriptions might they have given of his agonies! What melting irresistible appeals might they have made to the heart! While the scene was yet fresh in their remembrance, and their own hearts were still bleeding with the wounds which his death had inflicted upon them, was it not natural to concentrate all their eloquence on a subject, which must have seemed to them alone worthy of attention? Yet though they record his death, and attribute it to his love, they neither give impassioned descriptions of the one, nor attempt to raise in our minds exalted ideas of the other. They leave to us the office of making such reflections as the subject suggests.

This mode of writing indicates a very peculiar state of mind. It would be absurd to suppose that the writers had no feelings; and no motive can be assigned, for having intentionally suppressed them. An impostor would have avoided this appearance of indifference, which might have given rise to a suspicion, that he did not himself believe his own narrative. For the absence of all passion we can only account by admitting that their minds were controlled by supernatural influence.—Their own emotions and affections were suspended, that, during this interval of calm, the voice of the Divine Spirit might alone be heard. Such a history as that of Christ could not have been written but by inspired men.

2. Let us next turn our attention to the system of doctrine exhibited in the New Testament. On examination, it will appear to be so excellent, that the persons who published it to the world, must have drawn it from a purer and more exalted source than either their own meditations or the writings of others.

The account of God and his perfections, which we find in the New Testament, commends itself to our reason, as worthy of the highest and most excellent of all beings. He is represented as a pure Spirit, possessed of wisdom, holiness, justice, and goodness, eternal, almighty, and unchangeable, the Creator and governor of the world, the witness and judge of our actions. At the same time, his majesty is softened, if I may use this expression, by his benevolence, which is liberal and unwearyed in diffusing good through the universe: embraces the interests of our souls as well as of our bodies; and while it bestows in abundance the blessings and consolations of the present life, hath provided for us perfect and exalted felicity in a higher stage of existence. Of all the views of God which had been ever given, none was so calculated to endear him to us, and to inspire our hearts with confidence, as this short but interesting description, of which the scheme of redemption affords a pleasing illustration, "God is love." What men in all ages had in vain wished for, an atonement for sin, which conscience and their natural notions of Divine justice taught them to be necessary, the sacred books point out in the death of Jesus, whose blood, in consequence of the dignity of his person, our reason perceives to have been of sufficient value

to expiate the guilt of innumerable millions. In favor of the immortality of the soul, a point so important, but which to the wisest of the Gentiles seemed so doubtful, they speak in the clearest and most decisive language; and they hold up to the hopes and fears of mankind, rewards and punishments suited to their nature, and worthy of God to distribute. The system of morality contained in them is pure and rational; alike remote from the overstrained precepts of superstition and enthusiasm, and the loose, compliant maxims of worldly policy. It comprehends all the duties which we owe to God and to man; it is calculated for every rank and order, and speaks with equal strictness and authority to the rich and honorable, and to the poor and ignoble; and the happy effect of it, if it were generally practised, would be to change the face of the world, and make it resemble heaven.

Such are the outlines of the system of doctrine taught in the books of the New Testament. From this slight sketch, every person who has turned his attention to subjects of this nature, will be convinced, that no religion which was ever contrived by men, can come into competition with it. A comparison between the sentiments of the apostles and the most eminent philosophers of antiquity on the preceding articles, would turn out completely to the disadvantage of the latter. Their best descriptions of God would be found to be blended with puerilities and errors; their disquisitions on the immortality of the soul, to be full of hesitation, uncertainty, and arguments which could satisfy no rational inquirer; their notions of the mode of propitiating the Deity, to be as distant from the truth as those of the vulgar, with whose rites, frequently childish, and sometimes abominable, they complied; their schemes of morality, to be deficient in their catalogues of virtues and vices, the one being in some instances put for the other, separated from religion, the stock on which morality must be grafted, or it will never grow, and designed rather to furnish a subject of speculation, than to purify the heart, and regulate the practice. Who were the men that so far excelled them? Were they their superiors in genius, science, and learning? Had they read much, and reflected much; and was their system the fruit of profound research and long meditation? No: one of them was a publican, several of them were fishermen, and, with the exception of Paul, who had some Jewish learning which was of very little value, they were all rude and illiterate in the highest degree, and had scarcely thought on any subject but their daily occupations. From such men we could not have expected a regular, connected system of religion; and still less could we have looked for a religion, which, in the sublimity of its doctrines, and the purity of its precepts, should transcend every other that had appeared in the world. Whence, then, had they this wisdom, which is so conspicuous in their writings? Must it not have descended from the Father of lights, whose power is seen in perfecting praise out of the mouths of these babes and sucklings? It is impossible to account for the doctrine of the New Testament, as coming from such men, without admitting that they had received it by immediate revelation.

That the force of this argument may be fully perceived, I beg the attention of the reader to two particulars in their system; their notions of the Messiah, and their views with respect to the Gentiles.

That the Jews were expecting a person whom they called the Messiah is a historical fact, which will not be controverted. It is equally cer

tain, that their ideas of his character were very different from those which the sacred writers have adopted. We learn from the New Testament, and more fully from the writings of the Jews, that they flattered themselves with the hope of a temporal prince, who would command armies, subdue the nations of the world, and give the chosen people dominion and riches. That the disciples of Christ originally entertained the same notions with their countrymen, is not only highly probable, but is rendered certain by their own acknowledgment. They thought that his kingdom would be a kingdom of this world, in which there would be places of emolument and dignity, to be enjoyed by the favorites of the prince.* The idea of his sufferings and death had never once occurred to them; and when the subject was broached, it shocked their feelings, and drew from them expressions of disappointment and displeasure.† To what cause, then, shall we attribute so complete a change in their sentiments, that in their writings they speak only of a spiritual Messiah, who would save his people, not by fighting, but by dying: and would save them, not from the power of the Romans, but from sin, and death, and hell? The transition from carnal to spiritual ideas is slow and difficult; and is least of all to be expected from persons of uncultivated minds, whose conceptions are naturally gross and corporeal. This mental revolution, therefore, is certainly very surprising; and no satisfactory account of it can be given, but that which is suggested by the following words: "Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."‡

The Jews looked down with disdain upon the Gentiles, as a people whom God had forever abandoned; and they could not bear to think that those accursed idolaters, whom they despised and abhorred, should ever stand on equal terms with them, in the favor of their Maker. This national prejudice, we may believe, like other national prejudices, was strongest among the common people; and to this class, from which Paul and perhaps Luke were excepted by their education, all the other writers of the New Testament belonged. We learn from themselves, that they were at first as reluctant, as any of their countrymen, to admit the Gentiles to a participation of the privileges of the Gospel.‡ Whence then did these men afterwards become zealous advocates for the Gentiles, publish to them the glad tidings of salvation, and receive them by baptism into the Christian Church; though by these proceedings they offended the prejudices, and provoked the resentment of their unbelieving brethren? Whence did these selfish men become liberal? These bigots, philanthropists? Whence did fishermen and publicans form more exalted ideas of Divine love, and conceive a scheme of more extensive benevolence, than the most enlightened doctors in Judea? The following words of an apostle furnish an answer to these questions, and point out the only method of accounting for this singular fact in the history of the human mind. "Ye have heard of the dispensations of the grace of God, which is given me to youward; how that by revelation he made known to me the mystery,—which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be follow

* Mat. xxiii. 21. Acts i. 6.
† Pl. i.—19.

† Mat. xvi. 21, 22.

‡ Mat. xvi. 17.

irs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the Gospel."²

3. The inspiration of the New Testament may be inferred from the prophecies contained in it.

The argument from prophecy is plain and simple. We know the past by memory; the present by sensation and consciousness; and the future only by conjecture. From causes indeed which already exist and operate, we may infer the production of their usual effects; and, in some instances, the probability, that other men will act in a particular manner may be so great as to justify us in taking very important steps in reference to their expected conduct. If we except, however, the conclusions founded on the laws of nature, which will operate in the same way a thousand years hence as at present, our ideas of futurity are liable to be contradicted by facts, and for the most part are the combinations of fancy. Of events in particular, which shall take place many centuries or ages after our death, and which, in their contrivance and execution, shall depend on a thousand causes unknown to us, and connected with the free agency of men, it is impossible to form any conception. They are known to Him alone, who beholds at a single glance the past, the present and the future. If any person then utter a prediction, which afterwards is punctually fulfilled, it is manifest that he must have acquired the knowledge of futurity from Divine revelation. The consequence is undeniable, that a book, containing unequivocal prophecies, should be considered, not as a work of human ingenuity and foresight, but as the word of that Omniscent Being, who declares the end from the beginning.

That there are predictions in the New Testament, which have been fulfilled, and are at present fulfilling in the world, nothing but gross ignorance, or unblushing impudence, will prompt any person to deny. The prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem was delivered about forty years, and recorded about thirty, prior to that event; is expressed in the plainest language; and embraces a minute detail of particulars. How exactly it was accomplished we learn from Josephus, the Jewish historian, who was not aware, when relating the ruin of his country, that he was employed by Providence, to furnish an illustrious proof of the truth of the Gospel, and of the Divine character of Christ. Signs, portending the destruction of the devoted city, appeared in heaven above, and

² Eph. iii. 2, 3, 5, 6. A comparison of the apostles and the first christian writers would further illustrate and strengthen the argument. Both treat of the same subjects, and the latter had the benefit of the writings of the former; but how striking is the difference between the books of the New Testament, and the epistles of Clement and Ignatius, or any other work of the primitive fathers! In the epistle of Clement, there are many excellent advices against pride, and exhortations to unity and other christian duties; and in the genuine epistles of Ignatius, with the exception of the suppositions, there are scriptural sentiments and animated expressions of piety, particularly, I remember, in his epistle to the Romans: but how much do they fall short of the apostolic writings, in the depth of the matter, the closeness of the reasoning, the air of authority conjoined with simplicity, which we find in the latter? The reading of a few sentences of each will demonstrate the superiority of those which we are inspired. And whence this superiority could arise but from inspiration, it is impossible to conceive. Those fathers were not less learned than the apostles; nor do they appear to have been at all inferior in natural talents. We are certain that Clement, and it is not improbable that Ignatius was their companion and disciple; and indeed, as I have already observed, they had the apostolic writings as a model, whereas the apostles themselves were originals. Phil. iv. 3.

on the earth beneath; the armies of Rome drew near to besiege it; their idolatrous standards, fitly styled "the abomination of desolation," were displayed in the sight of its inhabitants; the walls of the temple were thrown down, and not a single stone was left upon another; and the ruins of Jerusalem exhibited an awful monument of the Divine vengeance, and with expressive silence admonished the spectators to beware of unbelief and disobedience. I shall not however, insist on this prediction, though it furnish one of the plainest and most conclusive arguments, in support of the christian religion. The suspicion, that it was written after the event, is contradicted by the unanimous voice of all antiquity, assuring us, that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, were published while Jerusalem was standing; and that only the Gospel of John, in which, it is remarkable, that the prediction is not inserted, was written after its fall. I shall pass over, likewise, the prophecies of Christ concerning his own death and resurrection, and shall confine the attention of the reader to those which respect, first, the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles; and, secondly, the antichristian church and its blasphemous head.

The Jews had long been the peculiar people of God; and though they were now greatly degenerated, yet the loss of their honors and privileges, which had continued during many ages, and amidst multiplied provocations, was an event of such a nature, as a Jew would not have naturally forboded, and no human sagacity could have foreseen. It was necessarily implied in their rejection, that they should be driven out of the land, which was given to their fathers for an inheritance; and that the temple should be destroyed, in which only the solemn rites of their religion could be legally performed. Had they been permitted to remain in the peaceable possession of Judea, and to carry on the services of the ceremonial law, there would have been no evidence, no visible proof, that they had ceased to be the favorites of Heaven. During the time of our Saviour's ministry, the Jews were at peace with the Romans, and there was not the least probability, that a war would arise between them. On the supposition of hostilities, the issue of the contest could not be certainly foreknown; or, if from the superior power of the Romans, it might have been reasonably conjectured, that they would ultimately be victorious, no man could have foretold, nor hardly have suspected, that they would demolish the capital city, and disperse the vanquished nation through the various provinces of the empire. It was not usual for the Romans to treat a conquered people in this manner, but rather to reserve them as a monument of the triumph of their arms. Yet our Lord, without having any probable ground to go upon, predicted, in the most explicit terms, that the Jews should, in a short time, be cast off, and that their rejection should be accompanied with the dreadful calamities of desolation and captivity.* The facts which prove the exact accomplishment of the prediction, are so well known, that it is unnecessary to lay them before the reader; and the truth of it is manifest at this day, from the state of Jerusalem, which is trodden down by the Gentiles, and from the despised and afflicted condition of the wretched remains of the nation, which are scattered over the face of the whole earth.

* Mat. xxi. 41—43. Mark xiii. 1, 2. Luke xxi. 24.

But while God rejected one people, he purposed to choose another, and to transfer to it the privileges of the former. In the room of the children of the kingdom who were cast into outer darkness," a state of ignorance and misery, "there should come many from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."^{*} As the conversion of the Gentiles was an idea, which could not naturally have occurred to a Jew, all whose prejudices were in opposition to it, so it was an event, than which we can scarcely conceive one more unlikely ever to take place. I have already had occasion slightly to mention the obstacles to the progress of the Christian religion. Its doctrines were perfectly new, contrary to the dogmas of the schools and the articles of popular belief, many of them mysterious, and the most of them, in the opinion of corrupt reason, absurd. The publishers were the lowest of the Jews, on whom the haughty Romans and the philosophical Greeks looked down with sovereign contempt. Its author was a private man, of low rank and no education, who had lived in poverty, and died in disgrace. It had been rejected by his countrymen to whom it was first presented, though it bore a close affinity to their own religion, and professed to be the end and completion of it; and would the Gentiles embrace it, to whom it must seem a barbarous system of unintelligible notions, and whose ancient, magnificent, established religions it came to overthrow? Such was the unfavorable aspect, under which our Lord knew that his Gospel would make its first appearance to the world. Never were so many circumstances combined against the success of any undertaking; never was human foresight so fully justified, as in the present case it would have been, in predicting an entire failure. Our Lord, however, hesitated not to foretell a very different result, namely, that his Gospel should meet with a cordial reception, in all quarters of the earth; that multitudes should become his disciples, and join themselves to his church; and that his death upon the cross, which threatened to be the greatest obstacle to its progress, as it subjected him to ignominy and contempt, should insure its triumph over all opposition.† Of predictions so plain, and of an accomplishment so exact, where shall we find a parallel instance, except in the Scriptures.

In the writings of Paul and John it is foretold, that a certain power should arise, which would assume the characters and attributes of Divinity, change the laws and ordinances of heaven, work signs and lying wonders to confirm its usurped authority and impious tenets, and persecute, with unrelenting fury, those who should refuse to submit to its domination. What is still more remarkable, it is foretold that this power would profess the Christian religion, for the man of sin is represented as sitting, not in a temple of idols, but in the temple of God; some of the doctrines and practices which he would impose upon mankind are specified; and the very place where he would erect his throne is pointed out, the imperial city of Rome.‡ Let any person seriously consider this account, with all its particulars, and he will be convinced, that nothing was more improbable, than the appearance of such a power, at the time when its rise was predicted. Who could have imagined, that any

* Mat. viii. 11, 12.

† Mat. xxi. 43. Luke xlii. 28—30. John xii. 30—33

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 1—12. 1 Tim. iv. 1—3. Rev. xvii. &c.

person calling himself by the name of Christ, would dare to usurp his place, and style himself the head of his church; would carry his impiety and arrogance so far as to claim the titles of Lord and God, and the attributes of holiness and infallibility; would have the audacity to interpose his mandates in cases already decided by the supreme authority of heaven; to prohibit what God had permitted and commanded, and to enjoin what He had forbidden? Who could have supposed, that Christians, in the days of the apostles, so enlightened, and so jealous of their spiritual liberties, would ever become so stupid and indifferent, as to allow such a power to raise itself on the ruins of their religion and their reason; and to exercise an imperious sway over their bodies and their consciences? Could fancy, in its wildest workings, have conceived, that Rome, the mistress of the world, the city where the Cæsars reigned, and idolatry triumphed in the plenitude of power and splendor; that Rome, where Christianity was little known, and was known only to be hated and proscribed, would at some future period acknowledge as its sovereign, a Christian priest? Nothing could have been more remote from the apprehensions of men; and if such an event or combination of events, had by some chance been suggested, it would have been deemed equally absurd as the most extravagant dream of a madman. Yet these improbable predictions have been most punctually fulfilled in all their circumstances, as protestant writers have unanswerably proved.

There is one book of the New Testament, which almost wholly consists of predictions, and ought to be considered as sustaining a very peculiar character. It is a history, written beforehand, of the church and of the grand political events connected with her fate, from the age of the writer to the end of the world. To consider the scheme of prophecy laid down in the Revelation, would lead to a discussion too tedious for this place. It may suffice to observe, that of its predictions many have been already fulfilled, as we have seen with respect to some of those which relate to the anti-Christian church; others are at present fulfilling; and hence we are authorized to expect, that the rest will be fulfilled in their order and season.

From this slight survey of the prophetical parts of the New Testament, the inspiration of the writers may be fairly deduced. If there be a decisive proof that a man spoke, not by his own spirit, but by the Spirit of God, it is this, that he declared things, which it was not possible for any creature placed in the same circumstances to have known by natural means. His knowledge in such a case is manifestly supernatural. He who foretold, with the utmost precision, events which did not take place for some hundred years after his death, must have had intercourse with that Being from whose eye nothing is hidden, and whose infinite mind comprehends the whole chain of causes and effects.

Some observations on the argument from prophecy will be introduced in the next chapter, when we consider the inspiration of the Old Testament.

The preceding illustration, I trust, will make the reader sensible of the strength of this third argument for the Divine authority of the Christian Scriptures. Conjoined with the two former arguments, it completes the proof which I proposed to bring; and I am persuaded, that in the mind of every person, who understands and seriously ponders it, the evidence now produced will give rise to a full conviction, that the books of the New Testament are not the compositions of men who meant to

ose upon the world, but a genuine revelation from heaven, in record-
which the writers were infallibly guided by the Spirit of Truth.

CHAPTER V.

The Inspiration of the Old Testament.

WHEN the Son of God expired without the gates of Jerusalem, the
l was accomplished for which the Jews had been separated from the
er nations of the world, and the law of Moses had been given. Their
al, therefore, lost all its force, and the observance of it was rendered
practicable, by the destruction of their temple and their dispersion
er the face of the earth. But the Jewish Scriptures did not become
less, and their authority was not abrogated, when the nation of which
y contain the history and the laws, ceased to exist in its political and
clerical capacity. We still revere them as authentic records of
ne dispensations which were introductory to the Gospel; and we re-
ive them as a part of the rule of faith and manners, the obligation of
ich is perpetual.

It must be acknowledged, indeed, that the Scriptures of the New Tes-
ment are more adapted to our circumstances, than those of the Old in
eral are; and that the former excel the latter in several respects.—
ery work of God is good; but as he is a wise and free agent, he does
t always work to the utmost of his power. One work, therefore, may
comparatively better than another, though he who is infinite in per-
fection be the author of both; and consequently one portion of revela-
a may surpass another in the importance of its matter, the clearness
its doctrines, and the rich and animating displays of Divine grace
ich it affords. The Gospel may excel the law, as the law was more
rious than the patriarchal dispensation. Yet ascribing, as we do, the
ne origin to the law and to the Gospel, to the writings of the prophets
d to those of the apostles, we assign to both an equal rank in the sa-
d canon; and we seek from both instruction with respect to the con-
ct of life and the salvation of our souls. I know of none, by whom
e inspiration of the Old Testament hath been denied, while that of the
w was admitted, except some ancient heretics, who seem indeed to
ve been delirious fanatics, and who affirmed, that the God of the Jews
is an evil being, and that Moses and the prophets were his ministers.*
In entering on the proof of the inspiration of the sacred books, I ob-
ved, that though their natural order required us to begin with those
the Old Testament, yet a considerable advantage would be after-
his found to result from first ascertaining the inspiration of the Chris-
a Scriptures. The advantage is this, that, if the New Testament be
proved to be inspired, the inspiration of the Old Testament must

*Of these the most noted were the Manicheans, or Manichæans, so called from
man, or Manichæus, the founder of the sect. It appears that they likewise reject-
ed some books of the New Testament. Mosheim's Hist. Cent. iii. chap. 8. (Similar
views were vented by other heretical sects.)

be admitted without farther proof, because its books are explicitly recognised in the former as Divine. Nothing more, then, can now be reasonably demanded from us, than to show, that the New Testament, of the inspiration of which we are already convinced, gives its sanction to the Old.

I may begin with observing, that the New Testament is founded on the Old, proceeds on the supposition of its Divinity, and professes to be an accomplishment of the plan laid down in its prophecies and typical institutions. "Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days."* It might be remarked, that when we see an extensive and complex plan executed, at the distance of many ages, even in its minutest parts, by the agency of persons, too, many of whom were totally unacquainted with it, while nothing was farther from the intention of the rest than to contribute to its accomplishment, we must pronounce the book, in which it is detailed, to have been dictated by the Spirit of Prophecy. But another opportunity will occur of introducing and illustrating this argument.

Our reasoning from the New Testament is not confined to the general argument drawn from its connexion with the Old, but extends to a variety of passages, in which the inspiration of the Jewish Scriptures is acknowledged. Among the privileges of the Jews it is mentioned by Paul as the chief, that to them were committed "the oracles of God."† By these oracles are evidently meant, writings containing the revelations which God had made of his will to their fathers; and that these writings were the same which were in common use among the Jews in his time, is evident from the references to them, in other parts of his epistles. In the second epistle to Timothy, he gives an express attestation to their Divinity. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."‡ The Scriptures, which he declares to be inspired, are chiefly, if not solely, the Jewish; for they are the same which Timothy had known from his childhood; and, in the early part of his life, no part of the New Testament was written. When our Saviour says to the Jews, "Search the Scriptures," or, as the word would be more properly rendered, "Ye search the Scriptures; for in them ye have eternal life, and they are they that testify of me:"§ he means, by the Scriptures, those writings which were held sacred among them; and he is so far from blaming them for believing their inspiration, that he justifies their esteem and respect for them, by subjoining, that they testified of him. The Jews, as we have already observed, divided their Scriptures into the law, the prophets, and the holy writings. This arrangement was, in some respects, extremely inaccurate; but under these three classes all the books of the Old Testament were comprehended. The following words, which have been already mentioned as a proof, that we possess the same books which in the days of Christ were received by the Jews, may be again brought forward to show, that they come to us under the sanction of his approbation. "These are the words which

* Acts iii. 22. 24.

† Rom. iii. 2.

‡ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

§ John v. 39.

I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me."* The greater part of the books of the Old Testament are quoted in the New: and the quotations are often introduced under the title of "the Scripture," the writing, by way of eminence, that is, the inspired writing, as is plain from the passage in the second epistle to Timothy, mentioned above; and they are always represented as of equal authority with the sayings of the apostles. "The Scriptures; foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel to Abraham, saying, In thy seed shall all nations be blessed." "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." "What saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." "The Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."† To enumerate all the instances of the same kind would be endless, and is perfectly unnecessary. I shall only add on this point, that neither Christ nor his apostles ever charged the Jews with having lost or suppressed any part of the Scriptures; with having inserted any human composition into the sacred canon; or with having adulterated the inspired writings with a mixture of their own opinions; so that we are certain that the ancient revelation hath been transmitted to us pure and entire.

The conclusion from these premises is obvious and incontrovertible. If the books of the Old Testament be declared in the New to be inspired, the necessity of any farther proof of their inspiration is superseded. We are authorized, by the arguments in the two preceding chapters, to assert, that the apostles and evangelists wrote under the impulse and by the assistance of the Holy Ghost. When they say, therefore, that the Old Testament is inspired, their testimony has equal authority, and claims equal credit, as when they publish any of the doctrines, or inculcate any of the duties of the Christian religion. It was not more possible that they should err in the one case than in the other. In truth, their testimony ought to be considered as the testimony of the same Spirit, by whom the writers of the Old Testament were assisted. It is the Holy Ghost speaking by them, who affirms, that the Jewish Scriptures are not the unassisted compositions of either pious or impious men; but were framed under his immediate direction and by the aid of his inspiration. They could not, therefore, without manifest inconsistency, be rejected by any person who is previously convinced of the Divine authority of the New Testament. Indeed, if we be fully persuaded of the inspiration of the latter, as we cannot reasonably doubt, so we will feel no inclination to doubt, the inspiration of the former.

Here then, we might close our proof, and proceed to the next branch of the subject. That I may not seem, however, to pass too slightly over a matter so important, and that nothing may be omitted through haste, by which the faith of the reader might be established, I shall, in the following part of the chapter, give a concise view of the arguments, which seem to prove, independently of the authority of the New Testa-

* Luke xiv. 44.

† Gal. iii. 8. 22. Rom. iv. 3. x. 11. xv. 4.

ment, that the books of the old are inspired. In order to bring forward distinctly the different species of arguments which are applicable to different books, I shall divide them into three classes; the Books of Moses, the Historical Books, and the Prophetical. Under these divisions they will all be comprehended, except a few, concerning which I shall subjoin some separate remarks.

I. I begin with the Books of Moses, which are first in order.

In proving their Divinity, I shall pursue a train of reasoning similar to that employed in the second argument for the inspiration of the New Testament. I beg leave, then, to lay down and illustrate the two following propositions, of which the second is a native and indisputable inference from the first. Moses was the writer of those books which are universally ascribed to him. If he wrote those books, they are inspired.

The first of these propositions is not only highly probable, from the spirit of ancient simplicity which breathes in the books, and renders it very unlikely that they were fabricated in a later age; but it is as certain as any thing of this nature can be, from the unanimous testimony of the Jews. If we believe other nations, with respect to the antiquity and authors of their laws, no reason can be assigned, why we should not give equal credit to them. Their testimony is as good as that of the Athenians concerning Solon, of the Lacedemonians concerning Lycurgus, of the Romans concerning Numa Pompilius, and of the Persians concerning Zoroaster; or rather, from circumstances which will be afterwards explained, and which led them to investigate this point with the utmost diligence and accuracy, they are better entitled to belief than any other people under heaven. But the Jews are not the only witnesses of this important fact. Moses was celebrated as a legislator among the Gentiles; and his writings, in which the laws are recorded which he delivered to the Israelites, are occasionally mentioned by them.* On this subject, indeed, there seems not to have been any question among either the friends or the enemies of his religion; but both concurred in believing him to be the author of those institutions, which were enjoined in the sacred volume of the Jews. To deny, therefore, that Moses was the writer of the Pentateuch, would set aside human testimony as a foundation of belief, and overthrow our faith in all ancient history; for there are few facts so fully attested.

In corroboration of this argument, founded on the united testimony of all past ages, it may be observed, that if Moses was not the writer of those books, but they were forged at a later period, as infidels insinuate, it was impossible that they could have been received, or by any art have been imposed upon the Israelites. If the writings be supposititious, they must have appeared in the next age, or several ages after the death of Moses. Had the deceiver published them soon after his death, the history of that lawgiver and his transactions was too fresh in the memories of the Israelites, to allow his fabricated account to gain any credit. The cheat would have been detected and exposed by those who had lived with Moses, or by their children, who had heard a faithful narrative of his laws and his conduct from their fathers. Their zeal for the honor

* Vid. Grot. de Verit. Relig. Christ. Lib. I. csp. 16. Just. Martyr. Cohort. ad Græcos.

their legislator, their desire to prevent the circulation and reception of falsehood, and the opposition which is naturally provoked by the meanness and audacity of imposture, would all have combined to hinder the progress of the forgery. Had he written at a later period, it would have been impossible to persuade the people, the men of knowledge and station, as well as the multitude, that such a system of laws as the Pentateuch enjoins had been delivered by Moses, to their progenitors; and to prevail upon them to make it from that time forward the basis of their civil and religious polity. They would have said to the impostor, What documents can you produce to authenticate these writings? How hath it happened, that if these laws were promulgated to our fathers, as you pretend, and the observance of them be the condition of our possessing the land which we inhabit, the memory of them hath been so completely lost, that not one but yourself ever heard of them before? We must suppose the Israelites to have been less than men, to have been children in understanding and simpletons of the lowest order, if we think, that the most artful knave could have imposed upon them such a code of laws as that which bears the name of Moses, as the genuine work of that ancient legislator. No man would now be able to persuade us, that a code of laws which he had drawn up in his closet, was enacted by our ancestors several ages ago; and still less could he persuade us, to repeal all our present laws and establish that new code in their room. But if the books of Moses were not written by himself, all this must have been done by some unknown person in the land of Judea.*

If Moses was the author of those books, which are universally ascribed to him, it follows, that they are inspired. That the propriety of this inference may be made evident, it will be necessary to take a view of the laws which they contain. The first thought which arises on a superficial survey of them is, that they were exceedingly burdensome; yea, a yoke, as the apostle Peter calls them, with neither the men of his age, nor their fathers, were able to bear.† Some of the services which they enjoined were very costly, as the sacrifices and the payment of

* It has been urged, as a proof that the books of Moses are not genuine, that some things are found in them, which have been evidently written in a later age. It is Velaire, I believe, who endeavors to make his readers merry at the idea of Moses having left on record an account of his own death. Deut. xxxiv. It hath been remarked, likewise, that some places are called by names, which we certainly know to have been given them, long after we assert that the Pentateuch was written. We read, that Abraham pursued the kings whom he had routed "unto Dan," Gen. xiv. 14, whereas we learn elsewhere, that its original name, Laish, was not exchanged for Dan, till the children of Dan conquered it in the days of the Judges, Judg. xviii. 28. In Gen. xxxvii. 14, and in some other places, mention is made of Hebron; but it appears from Josh. xiv. 14, 15, that its name was Kirjath-arba, before Caleb rescued it from Joshua as his inheritance. If, however, we should say, that some person added to the books of Moses an account of his death; and that the same person, or some other, in the room of ancient names which were forgotten, put the modern names, that the places might be known, we would make a concession, which would not at all affect the genuineness of the book; the objection would be repelled in the plainest and simplest manner; and the poor triumph of infidelity would cease. "A small addition to a book," says an eminent writer, and I may add, the occasional change of a name, "does not destroy either the genuineness or the authenticity of the whole book." A few other instances are either explained in the same manner, or it is shown, that there was nothing in the age and circumstances of Moses to hinder him from being the writer of such passages. Vid. Wits. de Prophetis et Prophetia, cap. xiv. Bishop Watson's Apology for the Bible; Letter iii.

† Acts xv. 10.

tithes; and some of them were very troublesome, as the p necessary to avoid pollution, and the various purifications. prescribed by them were contrary to those held sacred by nations; and could not fail, therefore, to render the Jews od eyes of their neighbors.* Instead of permitting an intercom worship, they taught the Israelite to regard every foreign rite horrence; and pronounced the service of a strange God to b punishable with death. Nay, the laws of Moses enjoined cert which no legislature but himself ever thought of enacting, without the miraculous interposition of Providence to preven lamities which they were calculated to produce, they would l fraught with certain ruin to the state. Thrice every year, all were commanded to repair to Jerusalem, and consequently, so country was to be left open to the incursions of its enemies every seven years, and two years together at the jubilee, t ordered to let their fields lie fallow, or, in other words, at the intervals, to expose themselves to the miseries of famine; were forbidden to multiply horses, or to make use of cavalr wars, from the want of which they must have fought on uneq with the nations around them.†

Here then; I may ask, whether it was at all probable, th would prevail upon his countrymen to submit to such a system. Would a people so self-willed and refractory, as from their hi know them to have been, allow a yoke so heavy to be wreath their necks? Or would a people attentive to their own and endowed with common-prudence, assent to a law which a have been expressly framed for the purpose of involving them poral ruin? Yet it is certain, that the Israelites did receive

* "Moses, quo sibi in posterum gentem firmaret." I quote the words c "novos ritus, contrariosque ceteris mortalibus indidit. Profana illicomnina nos sacra; rursum concessa apud illos, quæ nobis incesta." Hist. Lib. v. writers have maintained, that many of the Egyptian rites, corrected, the ledge, and improved, were adopted into the Jewish ceremonial; and in t his conduct, they say, God gave a display of his wisdom, as the minds of people as the Israelites could not have been reconciled to a new system c if some parts of the old one had not been retained. But this opinion proe supposition highly improbable, and which, being totally incapable of proof liberty to deny, that the rites of the Egyptians in the days of Moses were as they were found to be about a thousand years after, by the Greeks, fr writings we have acquired some knowledge of their religious observances. is not the only objection. The resemblance b tween the Egyptian and t rites at this late period, when there is certainly as much reason to suspect Egyptians had borrowed from the Jews, as that the Jews had borrowed Egyptians, if there was any borrowing in the case; the resemblance, I say the rites of the two nations is by no means so great as some writers, in t ness to establish a favorite hypothesis, represent it. Every man has his ov tion of what it is right and becoming for God to do; but to me it appears to his honor to maintain, that he admitted into his own worship, the a usages of idolaters. The best method, I should think, to preserve a people latry, is not to allow them to retain some of its ceremonies, which would t tempt them to return to it; but to confine them to a ritual entirely new. I add, that few christians will be able to prevail on themselves to believe, which had been used in the service of idols, or, as the Scripture calls the and which God, therefore, had beheld with abhorrence, were afterwards t into types of Christ and the sublime mysteries of redemption. The learr who would see this subject fully discussed, may consult Witsii Egyptiaca.

† Exod. xxiii. 17, 11. Lev. xxv. 1—12. 20—22. Deut. xvii. 16.

and observe it, during many ages, while they subsisted as a political body; and that they still entertain the highest veneration for it, and yield obedience to such of its precepts as are practicable in their present circumstances. This is surely a very astonishing fact. A people of the most stubborn dispositions submit to a most troublesome law; to a law which it seemed madness to obey. To endeavor to account for this fact, by supposing some artifice to have been employed by Moses to deceive them into a compliance with his measures, is by no means satisfactory. Their situation was not favorable to any trick or deception. Had they been separated into small companies, and scattered over the face of a large country, they might have become an easy prey to some cunning men in the interest of Moses, who might have succeeded in deluding them one after another; but they were united in one body in the wilderness, and were too unwieldy a mass to be moulded by the hand of an impostor. It is impossible to account for the reception of his law on any other principle, than that he satisfied the people with regard to his authority to enact it. Force could not have been employed; fraud would have been detected; and flattery would have tried in vain on a froward and jealous multitude. But no authority less than Divine could have sufficed to sanction such a law; no other authority could have controlled and silenced the many interests and passions which rose in opposition to it. Nothing could have overawed and subdued the turbulent spirit of the Israelites, but manifest tokens of the presence of God with Moses, and the dread of his Almighty power. The reception of his law, therefore, may be considered as a proof, that the Israelites had seen such works done by him, as convinced them that he was the minister and messenger of Jehovah, the God of their nation. He who will dispute this reasoning, must oppose it, not by impertinent cavils, of the futility of which he is himself probably sensible; but by showing how Moses could have succeeded, without a Divine commission, in making so vexatious and dangerous a law be embraced by so perverse a people.

Agreeably to these observations, we find him in the law appealing to miracles which are said to have been wrought before their eyes. This appeal is a proof that they were actually wrought; for Moses would not have risked his credit and influence among his countrymen, by boasting of attestations from heaven, which it must have been known by all who heard him or read his writings, were never given. He would not have dared to affirm, that Egypt was smitten by terrible plagues, if none had been inflicted upon it; that the Red Sea was divided before them, if they had not passed through the midst of its waves; that manna fell from heaven around their tents, if they had never eaten of that heavenly food; or that God spake to them out of the midst of the fire, if they had not heard his voice publishing the decalogue from Sinai. These events, on the supposition that they really took place, were exposed to the senses of all the people; and no man, who had not witnessed them, could have been persuaded that he had. If, however, it be conceived possible for one man to be reasoned or cheated out of his senses, we may, without hesitation, deny the possibility of such a deception in the case of two or three millions of spectators.

The miracles then, to which Moses appeals, were actually wrought, and, consequently, he was declared to be a prophet, and his law to be

a revelation from God; for, as we have seen in the case of the apostles, the miracles were the seal of heaven set to his commission. Hence we infer, that his writings, in which the law is contained, were inspired, because the same supernatural assistance, which he enjoyed in delivering it to the congregation, we may be certain, was vouchsafed to him in recording it for the benefit of succeeding generations. It is unnecessary to repeat the reasoning under the first argument for the inspiration of the New Testament, which might be employed, in this perfectly similar case, without any alteration. But it being once admitted that he wrote his law by inspiration, we can feel no difficulty in believing, that he was under the same infallible direction in the other parts of his writings. We may be confident that he, whom God hath empowered to make a revelation to mankind, will not be permitted to mingle his own stories and opinions with it. All those things, therefore, which are inserted in the same volume with the law, as the history of the creation, and of the world from the first ages to the deliverance from Egypt, are equally authentic as the law itself, and the account of the miraculous transactions in the wilderness. It would be highly unreasonable to limit the proof of inspiration from his miracles to one part, or to some parts of his writings. In strict language, the miracles attested his character, or pointed him out as a Divine messenger; and from such a person we are bound to receive as equally true and authoritative, every thing which he delivers in the name of God, whether law, history, doctrine, or prediction.

I have been the longer in proving the inspiration of the five books of Moses, because they are the fundamental part of the Jewish Scriptures; and a firm belief of their Divinity will prepare us for the reception of those other books, which we proposed in the next place to consider.

II. Let us now direct our attention to the Historical Books.

It is not my design, under this division, to discuss separately the proofs of the inspiration of each particular book; nor perhaps is it necessary, that I should attempt to prove their inspiration at all, because, since the days of the Samaritans, few, who admitted the divinity of the five books of Moses, have refused to acknowledge the authority of the remaining parts of the Old Testament. There is no satisfactory evidence in support of the vulgar notion, that the historical books were rejected, together with the prophetic by the Sadducees. Josephus brings no such charge against them; but on the contrary he says, that though they disregarded the traditions of the elders, they received τὰ γεγραμμένα, the written books. They are not accused of this crime by the Rabbies, nor is it likely that so great an offence would have been tolerated by their zealous countrymen; and they are represented by the Talmudists as reasoning from the other books, as well as from the law. Indeed the inspiration of the Pentateuch being supposed, that of the historical books seems naturally and almost unavoidably to follow. And it is no inconsiderable argument for their inspiration, that they are necessary to exhibit a complete view of that plan of Providence respecting the Jews, of which the giving of the law constituted, I may say, the first step. The following observations will illustrate this idea.

On the supposition that the books of Moses were inspired, and that the law delivered in them is Divine, it might have been expected, that we should be furnished with a narrative of the settlement of the

elites in the land of Canaan, which their lawgiver had promised them, as the name of God, as their inheritance, and in which alone his law was to be observed. A history, too, of the Divine dispensations towards them subsequent to that event, might have been added, to show, that, in their national capacity, they were treated according to the sanctions of their law; and that, as they prospered by obedience, so they were visited for their crimes with temporal calamities. In consequence of the change of the form of government, which was administered for a long period by judges, but afterwards became regal, an account was wanted of the causes which gave rise to this revolution; and in particular, of the elevation of the family of David to the throne, in which the Messiah was to spring. As of the twelve tribes, which originally composed the nation of Israel, ten having revolted from Rehoboam the grandson of David, and forsaken the worship of God at Jerusalem, were, after some time, led away captive into a land from which they never returned, a short history of these tribes seems necessary to acquaint us with the reasons why God rejected so large a portion of a people, whom he had chosen as his own inheritance. The story of the tribe of Judah was peculiarly worthy to be recorded, because the Messiah was to come from that tribe; and, in consequence of the apostasy of the rest, all the privileges of the church became its exclusive possession, and in it alone the true worship of God was preserved. A detail of its backslidings was requisite to account for its captivity in Babylon; and without a relation of its return, at the appointed time, to its own land, the faithfulness of God, in fulfilling the word spoken by his servants the prophets, would not have appeared.

These are the parts of the Jewish history, concerning which it seems proper that we should be informed; and they are all so closely connected with each other, that, had any of them been left out, the narrative would have been imperfect. Now, such a history as I have supposed, we find in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah; and the inspiration of these books is the more probable, because they contain the very things of which it was natural to expect an account, if the law of Moses proceeded from God himself, and the Israelites were under his peculiar care. To me it appears to be contrary to all reason to imagine, that though we have been favored with an inspired relation of the first transactions of God with that people, we should have only a human and uncertain history of subsequent transactions, to which the first were merely introductory.

In the books which I have mentioned, we meet with many miracles; and these, instead of rendering the history suspected, are, in my opinion, evidences of its authenticity. In the books of Moses, which we have viewed to be inspired, the Israelites are represented as under a miraculous providence. It is, therefore, as reasonable to look for miracles in their history, as not to look for them in the history of any ordinary people; and had nothing of that nature occurred in their historical books, we would have been justified in calling in question the truth of the whole narrative. The history of a nation under a miraculous providence, in which no supernatural interpositions are mentioned, but all things proceed in the usual train, would be as manifestly false, as the story of a warlike people, which described them as uniformly cultivating the arts of peace. Now it is not probable that God would leave a

miraculous history to be written in the same manner as a common history, namely, by men who had no particular call, and were qualified by no extraordinary assistance. It is more agreeable to our notions of his wisdom to believe, that he would expressly raise up chosen persons to give a faithful and authoritative record of such singular transactions. The omissions and misrepresentations, of which uninspired writers might have been guilty, through want of information, inadvertence, or design, would have defeated the intention of recording them. God would have been robbed of his glory, and we would have been deprived of the instruction and consolation which might have been drawn from the unusual displays of his power and goodness.

The persons by whom the historical books were written, are not now certainly known; but they are commonly believed to have been composed by men of a prophetic spirit, as Joshua, Samuel, Nathan, Gad, and other seers, Ezra, and Nehemiah. To these, as the writers of them, they have been ascribed by both Jews and Christians; and there are some passages in the books themselves, which appear to favor their opinion. If Joshua wrote the words of the covenant which he made with the people, it is not improbable, that he wrote likewise the other transactions in the book which bears his name.* Mention is made of books distinguished by the names of Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Shemaiah. "Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer." "Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer, against Jeroboam, the son of Nebat?" "Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies?"† From these passages we learn, that several persons, styled prophets and seers, because they were favored with supernatural knowledge committed to writing the transactions of their times; whence we may, with much appearance of reason, infer, that they were the compilers of some of those historical books, to which a place hath been assigned in the canon. It is probable, that by them the books of Samuel and Kings were written; and perhaps these are the very books to which reference is made, with some difference of the names, in the foregoing passages. The Chronicles have been ascribed to Isaiah, and to Jeremiah, but more generally to Ezra, who, it is allowed by all, wrote the book which goes under his name. The same thing is granted with respect to Nehemiah.

Though, however, we cannot determine with certainty the authors of the historical books; yet we may rest assured, that the Jews, who had already received inspired books from the hands of Moses, would not have admitted any other as coming from the same source, if they had not seen incontestable evidence, that the writers were supernaturally assisted. Next to the testimony of Christ and his apostles, which corroborates all our reasonings for the inspiration of the Old Testament, and, when distinct arguments for any particular book cannot be found, supplies their place, we must depend, in the case before us, on the

* Josh. xxiv. 20.

† 1 Chron. xxix. 29. 2 Chron ix. 29. xii. 15.

estimony of the Jews. And though the testimony of a nation be far from being, in every instance, a sufficient reason for believing its sacred books to be possessed of that Divine authority which is attributed to them; yet the testimony of the Jews has a peculiar title to credit from the circumstances in which it was delivered. It is the testimony of a people, who, having already in their possession genuine inspired books, were the better able to judge of others which advanced a claim to inspiration; and who, we have reason to think, far from being credulous with respect to such a claim, or disposed precipitately to recognise it, proceeded with deliberation and care in examining all pretensions of this nature, and rejected them when not supported by satisfactory evidence. They had been forewarned that false prophets should arise, and deliver their own fancies in the name of the Lord; and, while they were thus put upon their guard, they were furnished with rules to assist them in distinguishing a true from a pretended revelation.* We have a proof that the ancient Jews exercised a spirit of discrimination in this matter, though at a period later than that to which we refer, in their conduct with respect to the apocryphal books: for though these books were written by men of their own nation, and bore the names of the most eminent personages, Solomon, Daniel, Ezra, and Baruch, they rejected them as human compositions, and left the *infallible* church to mistake them for Divine. As the Jews then have, without a dissenting voice, asserted the inspiration of their historical books, their testimony, strengthened by their peculiar circumstances, authorizes us to receive them as a part of those Scriptures which were intended for our learning, that we, through the patience and comfort which by the Divine blessing they impart, might have hope.

III. I proceed to consider the Prophetical books.

The proof of their inspiration, which I shall lay before the reader, is not drawn from any external source, but arises from their contents. They carry in their bosom the evidence of their origin, and manifest themselves to be the Word of God by many clear predictions, which have been most exactly fulfilled, long after they were uttered. These are so numerous, that, at present, we can only select a few, as a specimen.

The fate of Egypt was thus foretold by Ezekiel: "It shall be the basest of kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations; for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations."† Accordingly we learn from history, that since the days of Ezekiel, it hath been successively subject to the Babylonians, the Persians, the Macedonians, the Romans, the Saracens, the Mamalucs, and last of all to the Turks, of whose empire it is, at this moment, a province, though in fact it be governed by a number of chiefs, called *Bey's*, who are the very refuse of mankind, having risen by various means from the condition of slaves.‡

The same prophet foretold the ruin of Tyre. "I will make thee like the top of a rock; thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon: thou shalt be built no more: for I the Lord have spoken it, saith the Lord

* See particularly Deut. xviii. 15—22.

† Ezek. xxix. 15.

‡ At the time of printing this edition, (1811) it is not decided, whether the Turks or the *Bey's*, shall be its masters; but under the domination of either, that miserable country will be equally base.

God."* And how punctually hath the prediction been fulfilled ! The city, which was a "mart of nations," as Isaiah calls it, is now become a heap of ruins ; and instead of being the resort of ships from every region of the earth, it is visited only by the boats of fishermen, whose nets are spread out to dry in the sun.

Concerning Babylon it was predicted, that it should be besieged by the Medes and Elamites ; that its river should be dried up ; that the city should be taken in the time of a feast, while her mighty men were drunken ; and that God would make the country around it a possession for the bittern and pools of water.† Now it is well known, that, in conformity to these prophecies, Babylon was besieged by the Medes and Persians, who are the same with the Elamites ; that Cyrus turned the Euphrates, which ran through the midst of it, out of its course, that his troops might find a passage by its channel ; that it was taken in the night during the dissipation and security of a feast ; and that the water of the river not having been afterwards confined to its ancient bounds, the adjacent country was converted into a marsh, frequented by aquatic birds. If any man shall suspect, as infidels have often insinuated, but were never able to prove, concerning the prophecies of Scripture, that the prediction was written after the event, let him think of the following words, which are fulfilling at this hour. "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation after generation ; neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, neither shall the shepherds make their folds there ; But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces : and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged."‡ It is long since the populous city was turned into a solitude ; long since it was converted into a chase for wild beasts by the kings of Persia ; long since it was rendered inaccessible by the poisonous animals which lodged in its ruins ; long since it ceased to be known. So completely hath God, according to his word, swept it with "the besom of destruction," that no man can now tell with certainty the place where it stood.§

Not to multiply particulars, there is one grands object, in which, as a centre, all the lines of prophecy meet. This is the Messiah, to whom gave all the prophets witness. The minuteness, with which the circumstances relative to Him are foretold, is truly astonishing, when viewed in connection with the exactness of the accomplishment. It is predicted that he should be a descendant of David, and that he should be born of a virgin, in the town of Bethlehem ; that having been anointed with the Holy Ghost, he should assume the character of a public teacher ; that he should perform great and beneficent miracles ; that his countrymen should despise and persecute him, and put him to death ; that he should rise from the grave, ascend to heaven, triumph over his enemies, and, though rejected by the Jews, be acknowledged and served by the Gen-

* Ezek. xxvi. 14. † Isa. xlii. 17. xxi. 2. Jer. l. 38. li. 36. 39. 57. Isa. xiv. 23.
‡ Isa. xlii. 19-23. § Isa. xiv. 23.

es.* Nay the time of his death is particularly mentioned; and are are not obscure hints of the manner of it, though crucifixion was a ecies of capital punishment unknown among the Jews, in the days of prophets.† These are only a few, selected from a great variety of particulars.

There are two classes of predictions concerning the Messiah, of which one describes his humiliation, and the other his glory. He is represented at one time as a worm, and no man, and, at another, as a prince higher than the kings of the earth; as a man of sorrows, and as one exceeding glad with the light of God's countenance; as dying, and yet abolishing death, as despised and rejected, and as honored and glorified.‡ These things are so contradictory, that it seems impossible, that they should be united in the same person. Accordingly the Jews, unable to reconcile the predicted humiliation of Christ, and the glory which necessarily belongs to his office, have invented, for the solution of the difficulty, the notions of two Messiahs, of whom the one is to suffer, and the other to reign. But this character, which is apparently made up of inconsistent qualities, was realized in Jesus Christ, who, though mean in respect of his manhood, is, in his Divine person, the image of the invisible God, and the first-born of every creature; who, by dying conquered death, and by his sorrows obtained for himself and his followers everlasting felicity; who was contumeliously treated, and indignantly rejected, by the Jews, but was preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world. A character, in which the extremes of abasement and exaltation meet, in which the weakness of humanity is associated with the power of the Godhead, it could not have entered into the mind of any man to conceive. He would have disjoined these extremes; he would have described a mortal like ourselves, feeble and imperfect; or a God elevated above all created beings, by the infinitude of his attributes. When we see, therefore, this character not only drawn by the prophets, but exemplified in our Redeemer, we are convinced, that as, on the one hand, it could not be a creature of their own fancy, so, on the other, it must have been suggested to them by Divine revelation. Were they not artists, endowed, like Aholiab and Bezaleel, with the spirit of wisdom, that they might paint the likeness of that singular personage, who, in the fulness of time, was to visit the earth?

As the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in Jesus Christ, was a proof of his Messiahship, to which he appealed, and from which his apostles reasoned, in a most conclusive manner, with the Jews; so it is a proof of the Divinity of their Scriptures, or of those books, at least, in which the prophecies are inserted. Prophecy is founded on the foresight of futurity; and the knowledge of futurity is a prerogative of the true God, by which he is distinguished from the vanities of the Gentiles. "They have no knowledge, that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. Tell ye, and bring them near, yea, let them take council together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the Lord?

* Isa. xi. 1. vii. 14. Mic. v. 2. Isa. lxi. 1. xxxv. 5, 6. llii. 1—10. Dan. ix. 26. Psal. xvi. 9, 10. lxxviii. 18. ii. 8. Isa. xlii. 1—4. xlix. 5, 6.

† Dan. ix. 24—27. Psal. xxii. 16, 17. Zech. xii. 10.

‡ Psal. xxii. 6. lxxxix. 27. Isa. liii. 3. Psal. xxi. 6. Isa. liii. 10, 12. xlv. 8. Psal. cxi. 27—31. lxxii. 18, 19.

and there is no God beside me, a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me."^a The foretelling, therefore, of future events, of which it was not possible to acquire the previous knowledge by any natural means, is an evidence, that God hath spoken by the prophet; and as the fulfilment of a prediction assures us, that the person who uttered it was Divinely inspired, so it warrants us to receive as Divine every other thing which he hath delivered to us in the name of God. A prophecy, like a miracle, attests in general the commission of the person by whom it was spoken. The prophetic part of a book, therefore, not only proves itself to be inspired, but proves likewise the inspiration of the whole of the book; for God would not allow a man, to whom he had given his Spirit, to mix his own sentiments with the revelation which he was empowered to make, and to impose his own ideas on the world, as of equal authority with those which had been supernaturally communicated to him. Hence, we infer, concerning some books of the Old Testament, that every part of them is inspired, because we observe that some of the parts consist of unequivocal predictions. A prophet would not lie to us in the name of God; nor though he were inclined, would he be suffered to deceive us. The power of God is certainly sufficient to overrule all the propensities of the human heart, and to suppress such of them as would interfere with his designs; and we have the highest assurance from his holiness and goodness, that he would not permit a man to abuse a commission from himself, in order the more successfully to mislead others, in the most momentous of all concerns, those of the soul and eternity.

IV. I proposed to make some remarks on those books of the Old Testament, which have not been included under the preceeding division.

Notwithstanding this imperfection, I adopted that division in preference to the Jewish, which comprehends all the books, because in consequence of the very injudicious manner in which they are arranged by the latter, the same arguments which apply to some of one class, are not applicable to others. Prophetic and historical books are jumbled together. In the Jewish division, the holy writings include the Psalms and the Chronicles. But the books of Chronicles are historical, and admit of a different kind of proof from that which is adapted to the Psalms: for though many of these are purely devotional, yet I hesitate not to rank them, as forming one collection among the prophetic books, not only because David, the principal writer, is termed a prophet,[†] but because they contain many predictions relative to the Messiah, his sufferings, his glory, and his kingdom. The attentive reader would observe, that agreeably to this view of them, several of the prophecies mentioned under the last head, were quoted from the Psalms. Since, then, some books of the Old Testament have not yet been considered, it is necessary, before this chapter be closed, to say something concerning them.

It would be highly unreasonable to demand, and difficult, if not impossible, to give separate proofs of each particular book. Separate proofs of each, indeed, are not necessary. As they constitute one volume, one whole, one entire revelation; if some of them, and especially if the greater part of them be proved to be inspired, the inspiration of

^a Isa. xiv. 20, 21.

[†] Acts ii. 30.

rest, which are so closely connected with them, cannot be denied. On this ground we feel no hesitation in acknowledging the authority of the books of Esther, Ruth, Job, and the writings of Solomon. They have been always classed by the Jews with those books, of the inspiration of which we have undoubted evidence; and they are attested, in common with them, by Christ and his apostles.

Though, however, these considerations may suffice to remove any scruple in our minds, with regard to their Divinity, it may be useful farther to observe, that on examining them, they appear to be equally worthy to be accounted inspired, as other books of the same nature with them, concerning which, after the arguments formerly advanced, there can be no dispute. The book of Esther records a single instance of the care of providence over the church, and a deliverance not less wonderful than any of those related in the other historical books. It holds out a striking example of the unexpected methods, by which God defeats the purposes of the wicked, and saves his people, when standing on the brink of destruction. The book of Ruth will not seem undeserving of a place in the sacred volume, when we consider, that besides giving an example of the observance of a peculiar law, it takes occasion, from the marriage of that woman with Boaz, to trace the genealogy of his great-grandson David up to Judah by Pharez, and is introductory to the history of that eminent progenitor and type of the Messiah. Thus, what at first appears to be the simple story of a virtuous but obscure woman, rises into importance from its connexion with the royal family of the Jews, and the evidence which it supplies of the descent of Jesus Christ in the exact line pointed out by the prophecy.* The sublimity of the book of Job equals that of any other portion of Scripture, and leads us, therefore, to attribute the composition of it to a higher author than man; not to mention the admirable and edifying example of patience and resignation which it sets before us, or the majestic and affecting representations which it gives of the greatness and sovereignty of God. The wisdom displayed in the writings of Solomon, corresponds with the exalted character which he bears in Scripture; and far exceeds what in his circumstances he could be supposed to have acquired by natural means. This superiority is acknowledged by a celebrated author, who hath headed the cause of infidelity with insidious eloquence. Having quoted these words, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity," as the words of Solomon, he subjoins,—"If the Ecclesiastes be truly a work of Solomon, and not, like Prior's poem, a pious and moral composition of more recent times, in his name, and on the subject of repentance. The latter is the opinion of the learned and free-spirited Grotius; and indeed the Ecclesiastes and the Proverbs display a larger compass of thought and experience than seem to belong either to a Jew or a king."† The suspicion, founded on their intrinsic excellence, that they are the works of some other person of a different rank and nation, is proved to be destitute of any foundation, by the unanimous testimony of past ages; and we certainly know that they were written by Solomon, we may convert this concession of an enemy into an argument for their heavenly origin.

* Gen. xlix. 10.

† Gibbon's History, chap. xli. Note 33.

CHAPTER VI.

Proofs of the Inspiration of the Scriptures in General.

BESIDES the proofs of the inspiration of the Scriptures in the preceding chapters, there are some arguments of a more general nature, which it would be unwise to overlook, not only because nothing should be omitted, which is calculated to confirm our faith and arm us against the assaults of infidelity ; but because they are sufficient, independently of every other consideration, to beget a strong conviction in our minds.

They turn chiefly on the internal evidences of the Divinity of the Scriptures, arising from the sentiments contained in them, the spirit which they breathe, and the effects which they produce on the soul of man. Different kinds of evidence affect persons of different dispositions. Some are most pleased with a chain of reasoning which bears a resemblance to the demonstrations of science ; while to others, that evidence is more agreeable, which is addressed to the moral principles and feelings of the heart. Some demand external proofs of the truth of revelation ; others fix their attention principally on the arguments arising from its genius and tendency. It is by means of both kinds of evidence that we may expect such a persuasion of the inspiration of the Scriptures to be produced, as shall rise superior to the sophistry and the sarcasms of unbelievers. The impression which miracles and prophecy have made upon our minds, will become still deeper, when we perceive, that the revelation which they attest, has unequivocal characters of Divinity stamped upon it, which show it to be worthy of all acceptance.

Of the six arguments which I propose to illustrate in this chapter, five are drawn from the Scriptures themselves ; while the last infers their inspiration from the care which providence hath exercised about them.

I. The Inspiration of the Scriptures may be proved from their sublimity.

By terming them sublime, I do not mean that they are written in pompous language. This, indeed, is the idea which some form of sublimity ; but they betray the wretchedness of their taste, and their complete ignorance of the subject. Sublimity lies not in the expression, so much as in the sentiment. It is the elevation of the thoughts ; and, in every true example of this kind, it is the subject which raises the style, not the style which gives dignity to the subject. A passage may be sublime, which is composed in the most simple and artless manner. No technical forms of composition are employed in the Scriptures ; no rhetorical flights are introduced ; no attempt is made by the writers to communicate splendor or majesty to their discourses, by means of artificial decorations ; and yet they as far transcend the highest efforts of human eloquence, as the sky adorned with millions of stars surpasses the puny imitations of it by the ingenuity of mortals.

When we cast our eyes over the Scriptures, we perceive in them an extent and sublimity of conception, which make the works of the boldest and most comprehensive genius appear mean and grovelling. The ideas held out by the sacred writers of God and his perfections, of the dependence of all creatures upon him as the Author of their existence, of his power over all nature, the fiercest elements of which yield unresisting obedience

o his will, of his universal government, of the designs of his providence, and of the issue of his administrations, are perfectly original, immediately recommend themselves to our reason, and by their magnificence convince us, that it was from a higher source than reason that they flowed. The unassisted human mind is not capable of thinking so nobly on Divine things. We debase the loftiest of all subjects by the meanness of our sentiments, and the flatness and insipidity of our language. A system, therefore, which displays such elevation of thought, and is so agreeable to our best conceptions of God, may well be supposed to have emanated from himself, who alone can enable the stammering tongues of mortals to speak of him in a manner worthy of his infinite dignity.

If we turn our attention to particular instances of sublimity, they are so numerous, that it is difficult to make a selection. Can any thing be more sublime than the account of the creation given by Moses? There is no attempt made to astonish the imagination by an elaborate description; but if I may speak so, Omnipotence is exhibited to our view naked and unadorned. The Almighty speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast. God said, "Let there be light, and there was light."* A heathen writer hath quoted this passage, as an instance of the sublime; and I will venture to assert, that a more noble example of it could not have been furnished by all the poets, historians, and orators, whose writings he had perused.† What can be compared with the following description of the power of God over the universe? "Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? which removeth the mountains and they know not? which overturneth them in his anger; which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble; which commandeth the sun and it shineth not, and scaleth up the stars; which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea; which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south; which doeth great things past finding out, yea, and wonders without number."‡ Nothing can be conceived more calculated to fill our minds with astonishment and awe, than this representation of the greatness of Jehovah: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in; that bringeth the princes to nought; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity."§ In all these instances the language is simple; the thoughts are worthy of that Being, whose majesty and glory are described.

* Gen. i. 3.

† Vid. Longin. de Sublimitate, Sect. ix.

‡ Job. ix. 4—10.

§ Isa. xl. 12—17. 22, 23.

But of examples there is no end. They meet the eye every where, especially in the Psalms, Job, and the prophetic writings; and they occur, not only in the compositions of David and Isaiah, men, from whose rank and opportunities we might have expected elevation of mind, the former being a king, and the latter, if not one of the royal family, having free access to the court; but likewise in those of Amos, whose want of education and habits of life promised only the most common thoughts expressed in the homely language of the vulgar. There is nothing more sublime in the Scriptures themselves, than the following passage in the prophecies of the herdsman of Tekoah; nothing which excels or equals it in any human composition: "For lo! He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, the Lord, the God of Hosts, is his name."^{*}

Examples of the sublime are not so frequent in the New Testament, which is in general written in a plainer style, as it consists, for the most part, of historical narration, in which simplicity is one of the best ornaments; and of epistles composed with a design to instruct those to whom they were addressed, in the doctrines of faith, and the duties of the Christian life. Yet it would be easy to select a variety of passages describing the glory and perfections of God, and that august and solemn scene which will close all human things, which equal any of those now cited from the Old Testament.[†] There are three descriptions of the Supreme Being, which, in a few simple words, convey more just and elevated ideas of him, than the most elaborate and splendid compositions of human genius and eloquence. "God is a spirit;" "God is light;" "God is love."[‡] In these short sentences, more is taught concerning him than philosophy had ever learned; more matter is compressed, than was spread over the pages of all the wise men among the Gentiles. It is only necessary to peruse their writings, to be convinced, that none of them ever entertained equally sublime conceptions of the spirituality, the purity, and the benevolence of the Deity.

The inference from all these particulars will occur to every reader.—That sentiments so lofty and dignified should flow from the pens of writers who were, for the most part illiterate; that they should originate with Jews, who, compared with the polished nations of antiquity, were a rude and barbarous people, is undoubtedly very surprising; and when we observe, that their writings throw those of all other men into the shade, can we avoid the conclusion, that their faculties were elevated by supernatural influence; that their thoughts were the dictates of heavenly wisdom, not the offspring of their own minds; and that the appropriate language, in which they are expressed, was suggested to them by the Spirit of God? I know, indeed, that some men have dared to arraign the Bible as destitute of either sublimity or beauty, and to prefer to it some ancient writings, which, though unquestionably excellent, it hath long been the fashion of pedants to praise beyond the limits of sense and decency; but I know, likewise, that their taste was as corrupted as their impiety was detestable. The Koran of Mahomet hath been celebrated for its eloquence; and the impostor himself, in the want of real

^{*} Amos iv. 13.

[†] 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. 1 Thess. iv. 15—17. Rev. xx. 11—15. &c.

[‡] John iv. 24. 1 John i. 5 iv. 8.

miracles, pretended that the composition was so admirable as to demonstrate its claim to inspiration. But the most sublime passages have been evidently stolen from the Scriptures, and have lost a portion of their original dignity by the changes which the deceiver hath made upon them, in order to conceal his depredations. When compared, therefore, with parallel passages in the sacred books, their grandeur is lost "in the blaze of a greater light."* "Its loftiest strains," says a writer by no means partial to the Scriptures, "must yield to the sublime simplicity of the book of Job, composed in a remote age, in the same country, and in the same language."† His idea of the language, in which the book of Job was written, may be disputed; but his character of its composition, and the preference which he gives it to the Koran, are proofs, that, laying aside for a moment, the prejudices of infidelity, he hath decided according to the dictates of a just taste, and a sound understanding.

II. A second argument for the Inspiration of the Scriptures is drawn from their piety.

The sacred books breathe a spirit of devotion towards God, of holy reverence, of faith, of resignation, of zeal for his glory. Their tendency is to form in our minds just and elevated conceptions of his nature; to make us acquainted with the relations in which he stands to us, and to impress upon our hearts a sense of the obligations which flow from them; to beget and cherish the disposition and the habit of contemplating him in every object and occurrence, and of referring all things to him; to inspire us with the sentiments and affections, which correspond to his infinite excellencies, and are a due return for his beneficence; and to excite us to consecrate ourselves to his service, and to glorify him with our souls and our bodies which are his. They seem to have been written with the express design to lead us to admire the perfections and the works of God; to praise his goodness and adore his justice, in the dispensations of his providence; and to yield cheerful and conscientious obedience to his laws.

In human compositions, atheistical and irreligious sentiments are too often introduced; or the subject of religion is purposely avoided, because disagreeable to the author, or to those whom he wishes to be his readers; or when it is the avowed intention of the writer to treat of God and our duty to him, ideas are brought forward of a nature fitted to cool and to repress the emotions of piety. While too much, sometimes all, is ascribed to the wisdom and virtue of man, or to the power of natural causes, God is kept out of our view, we lose all sense of our dependence upon him, and our gratitude is weakened or extinguished. This will be found, on due consideration, to be the tendency and the real effect even of some writings which profess to be religious. But in the Scriptures every thing leads us directly to God. All good is represented as flowing from his hand; all events as ordered by his wisdom; all men as the instruments, which he employs to execute his purposes. We are conducted behind the curtain and shown the hand which moves all the springs of the mighty machine; which causes all the revolutions in the universe. One Great Agent appears, whom creatures animate and inanimate serve. Their powers, their talents, their virtues, their achiev-

* White's Sermons, Sermon vi.

† Gibbon's History, chap. L.

ments, instead of being placed in opposition to him, as advancing a rival claim to our admiration and praise, conspire to display his glory and to elevate our ideas of him, by being exhibited both as the gifts of his bounty, and as the means by which he carries forward his plans to their completion. In short, by the light of the Scriptures we behold him in every place and in every event; and their manifest design is, to make him the continual object of our meditation, our confidence, our love, and our homage.

To the Scriptures, men are indebted for all their just notions of God; and if there be some places of the earth, where worthy conceptions are formed of his essence, his attributes, his government, his worship, and the obedience which we owe to him, they are those places alone, in which the books, by us held to be inspired, are known. There is hardly any person who is not apprised of the superiority of Christian to heathen nations, ancient and modern, in their ideas of religion. The conceptions which a peasant among us entertains of the Divine Being, are more exalted, and the worship which he offers to him is purer and more dignified, than were the conceptions and the worship of the most enlightened and devout philosophers of Greece and Rome. "The most ignorant Christian," says a sensible writer, "knows more of God, of true religion, and of moral obligations, than the most knowing pagan that ever lived. A modern philosopher would turn a downright adorer of Plato or Cicero, should he find such a lecture in either of them concerning the unity, the omnipresence, the omniscience, the justice, mercy, and power of God, concerning the creation of the world, the degeneracy and corruption of human nature, and the means of its recovery, as a poor tradesman or farmer delivers to his children on a Sunday evening."* Now reason was the same in the Gentiles as in us, and in some of them it existed in higher perfection than in the most of us; the book of nature was open to their inspection as well as to ours; and their diligence in studying it cannot be exceeded. How, then, shall we account for our superiority; a superiority which is seen in the lowest of us when compared with the highest of them? How shall we account for it but by remembering, that, besides the book of nature with which alone they were favored, we enjoy the book of revelation? Some just notions of God prevail among Mahometans; but they are derived from the Scriptures, to which, as we have formerly observed, the Koran is indebted for its purest sentiments, and its sublimest passages. The argument which is drawn from the piety of the Scriptures to prove their inspiration, we shall connect with another argument, furnished by

III. Their purity or holiness.

Human writings usually bear evident marks of the moral imperfection of their authors. If there be any exceptions, they are such writings as have been fashioned most exactly after the model of the Scriptures.—Something is often found in them to provoke and inflame the passions, to justify or palliate their excesses. Even systems of morality are extremely deficient both in precepts and in prohibitions; some vices are tolerated either in whole or in part, and some virtues are omitted. Virtue is not carried to its highest pitch; allowances are made for human frailties, which, in plain language, are the irregular passions and incli-

* Deism Revealed, vol. ii. p. 55.

actions, of human nature; and less respect is paid to the purity of the motives of action than to the action itself. The intelligent reader will perceive that my subject leads me to speak only of such writings as have been drawn up by persons who had not the assistance of revelation. Yet the remarks now made may be extended to too many writings of Christians, even to some which have been much admired and celebrated, as teaching the purest religion and morality. The depravity of man is a subtle poison, which insinuates itself into every thing that comes into contact with it, and the operations of which the most powerful antidotes cannot entirely prevent.

On the Scriptures there is engraved in legible characters the same inscription which adorned the high priest's mitre, "Holiness to the Lord." Indeed, we cannot but consider them as a transcript of the Divine purity, when we observe how careful they are to exhibit God as glorious in holiness; and with what earnestness they recommend conformity to him as our honor and our happiness. To every relation and condition of life they extend their authority, and prescribe the duties, which, in that relation, we are bound to perform. They grant no toleration to any of the works of the flesh; but by one comprehensive sentence they condemn them all as offensive to God, and inconsistent with salvation. No liberty is allowed to any of those appetites and passions, which operate most powerfully in our nature, and to which false religions, finding themselves unable to control them, are necessitated to give some indulgence, as covetousness, ambition, revenge, sensuality. They inculcate all those virtues, and condemn all those vices, which had ever been the subjects of human injunction and restraint; they prescribe duties which the purblind wisdom of philosophers and statesmen had not discovered, and stigmatise as criminal, certain tempers and practices, which they had permitted as innocent, or recommended as praise-worthy. Not only do the disorders of the life fall under their disapprobation; but the corrupt principle from which they proceed, even when it lurks unseen, and confines its activity to the heart, is treated with equal severity. The law of man says only, "Thou shalt not steal;" but the law of the Scriptures, carrying its prohibition much higher, says, "Thou shalt not covet." The law of man forbids adultery; but the law of the Scriptures, the first emotion of criminal desire. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."* In a word, it is their manifest design to destroy sin in its root and its branches, to crush it in the bud, as well as to blast its flowers and its fruits. They aim at subduing and finally eradicating our sinful appetites and affections; and at establishing as the supreme law of our thought, words and actions, the will of God.

Let us now conjoin these two qualities of the Scriptures, and ask from what source a book so pure and so pious hath proceeded. It cannot be the work of man, because it is too perfect to come from so imperfect a being. All his works of this nature give manifest proofs of his weakness and depravity. If, however, we should admit for a moment that the Scriptures are a human production, it is plain that the authors must have been either good or bad men. That they were good men is impossible;

* Mat. v. 27, 28.

for no good man would act the part of an impious impostor, and pretend a divine inspiration which he did not enjoy. A good man would not speak or act wickedly, even for God; and besides, this very book, which persons of this character are supposed to have written, denounces the most dreadful judgments on false prophets, who forge a commission from heaven, and condemn lives of every description to suffer the everlasting torments of hell. Pious truths, or the use of artifice and falsehood in propagating the truth, and endeavoring to promote the spiritual interests of mankind, though they have been countenanced by the approbation and the practice of some Christians, are contrary both to the letter and to the spirit of their religion.* Common sense forbids us to believe, that the writers of the sacred books, if they were impostors, would, without any necessity, have passed sentence on themselves; and inculcated such moral precepts, as were at variance with their own conduct, and must have rendered them, if they were ever detected, the objects of universal execration. It is equally evident, that the Scriptures were not fabricated by bad men. Would they have devised the most devout system of religion, and the purest system of morality, which were ever presented to mankind? Men who hated and disobeyed God, would not have taught us to love and serve him: they, who took pleasure in sin, would not have represented it as abominable, and employed the most powerful arguments to dissuade us from committing it. Nay, I will venture to assert, that bad men have a judgment too inaccurate, and a taste too gross, to be able to compose such a book as the Bible, in which moral distinctions are so refined, the corrupt principle is traced to its inmost recesses and detected under its most specious disguises; and certain actions which are admired by the world, as the most sublime efforts of virtue, are pronounced to be of no value. The mode of thinking in morals, which appears in the Scriptures, is the most distant imaginable from that of men who were the slaves of vice. It is superior to the ideas even of the most virtuous men, who have not learned to think from it.

It being manifest, then, that the Scriptures are not the work of men of any description, it remains that we attribute them to God, whose image and superscription they bear. Their piety and purity are features, by which they are known to be his offspring. As it is their uniform aim to communicate just ideas of his nature, his attributes, and his dispensations; as they inculcate those sentiments and affections which are suitable to his character, and to the relations which he bears to us; and, as they teach us to detest that abominable thing which he hates, and to cultivate those virtues which he approves; who can doubt that they are a revelation from himself, intended to form us into his likeness, and to excite us to fulfil the purposes for which we were brought into existence, by imitating and glorifying him?

IV. The efficacy of the Scriptures furnishes another argument in favor of their inspiration.

By their efficacy, I mean the power which they have exerted in former times, and which they continue to exert, in changing the principles and subduing the passions of men, in purifying their hearts, in inspiring them with undaunted courage, and elevating them above all earthly and

* Rom. iii. 5—8.

considerations; in fine, in causing such moral and spiritual effects, means merely human would have been sufficient to produce. We are naturally led to take notice, in the first place, of the success which the Gospel was crowned at its first publication. Multitudes, in countries to which the ministrations of the apostles extended, leaving the religion of their fathers, the peace which they enjoyed, the lusts in which they had lived in their ignorance, assumed the yoke of Christianity, though it demanded many costly sacrifices and cult services; and this was done, not only by the poor who had much to lose, but by many of the rich and noble, whose estates and fortunes were at stake; not only by the vulgar who might have been easily moved upon, but by men of talents and education, versed in learning and philosophy, whom nothing but the irresistible evidence of truth could have persuaded to disclaim their former wisdom as folly. There is in all history so astonishing an event, as the conversion of the world to the Christian faith. None of those motives, which usually influence men to change their opinions, had any share in effecting it. On the contrary, it was opposed by a regard to present interest, honor, ease, and by all the corrupt propensities of the heart. This conversion, too, was not accomplished by worldly might and power, by reasonings and captivating eloquence, but by a simple statement of the facts and doctrines of the Gospel. Hence we have inferred, in the foregoing chapter, that miracles must have been wrought by the first preachers of the truth to prove their commission from God, and to attract the attention of mankind.

We may advance a step farther, and say, that miracles alone will not account for their success, as is evident from this consideration, that those who witnessed the wonderful works performed by the apostles, did not acknowledge the truth of their doctrine. I know, indeed, that the progress of the Gospel, in the first ages, hath been sometimes ascribed solely to the miracles by which it was confirmed; but I know, that Christianity hath not seldom been maintained on unequal grounds. When writers against infidelity deny or overlook the efficacy of the illuminating and regenerating influences of the Spirit, they pretend a religion, a fundamental article of which they do not know, are too proud to admit. Without miracles the world could not be required to believe; for reasonable beings cannot be convinced without evidence; and God, in proposing a revelation to them, must deal with them agreeably to their intelligent nature. But that the progress of the understanding is not always followed by the consent of the heart, is plain from the instance of the Pharisees, who not being able to deny the truth of the miracles of Christ, malignantly ascribed the assistance of Satan.* A supernatural influence, therefore, must be in the minds of those whom they addressed, must have accompanied the discourses of the first Christian missionaries, rendering them able to conquer strong prejudices, control imperious lusts, and cause a complete revolution in the ideas, principles, inclinations, and conduct of converts. Now what the discourses of the apostles did, the same things may be said to have done. There is no reason for making an exception. The system of doctrine which they have written is pre-

* Mark iii. 22—30.

cisely the same with that which they preached. It is the substance of their sermons, a succinct account of that revelation which they detailed more copiously in public ; and by consequence it may be justly considered as having exerted all that energy, by which, as one of them observes, "imagination and every high thing which exalted itself against the knowledge of God were cast down, and every thought was brought into captivity to Christ."* The power of their doctrine is produced by the apostles themselves as a proof of its divinity. "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom ; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness ; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."†

A second proof of the efficacy of the Scriptures is furnished by the resolution, with which they have inspired multitudes of both sexes, and of every age, to part with all their interest in this world, and to surrender life itself amidst the severest torments, rather than renounce the profession of the Gospel. The composure, the firmness, the unconquerable patience, the triumphant joy of the martyrs in the early ages, struck the spectators with astonishment, and prevailed upon many of them to embrace a religion, which proved itself to be Divine, by raising human nature above itself. Now, what animated these holy persons to submit to tortures, the bare recital of which makes us shudder with horror ? Were they madmen who had no purpose in view ? Were their nerves formed of iron, and their bodies insensible of pain ? No : they felt as other men feel ; and they knew the value of life too well to throw it away. But they were assured of the truth of the revelation contained in the Scriptures ; and as they accounted it their duty to assert its truth in the face of the most formidable dangers, so they were borne up, in circumstances apparently more than sufficient to have overcome their courage and constancy, by its hopes and consolations. It was in the expectation of that recompense which it promises to the faithful, that they cheerfully suffered the loss of all things on the earth. They ought to be considered, therefore, as having shed their blood to attest their persuasion of the Divine authority of the Scriptures ; and this was more particularly the case with respect to such of them as refused to redeem their lives, by delivering up the sacred books to be destroyed by their persecutors.

Farther, their efficacy appears in the authority which they exercise over wicked men, on whose passions they impose restraints, and in whose bosoms they awaken bitter remorse for the past, and the dread of a future reckoning, which disturbs them not only, in the hours of solitude when they are alone with their consciences, but in the midst of their jovial companions and in scenes of dissipation. That they exert this power in the secret retirement of the heart we learn from the confessions of the penitent, who tell us how unhappy they often were in the days of their folly ; and from the exclamations of the convinced, but unreclaimed, who suffer the horrors of despair. There is, I may add, a tacit acknowledgment of their power in the eagerness discovered by the impious and profligate, to disprove their authority. That is evidently an eyesore, which a person is incessantly endeavoring to

* 2 Cor. x. 5.

† 1 Cor. i. 22—24. Rom. i. 16.

remove out of his sight, If the wicked did not *feel* the Scriptures to be at war with their happiness, though they would not befriend them, yet they would let them alone.

In a word, the change produced, by means of the Scriptures, in the tempers and behavior of men, shows them to be possessed of an efficacy greater than was ever exerted by any other system of doctrine. Philosophy could boast of two or three, whom its eloquent exhortations had persuaded to abandon their profligate courses; "but what are these few examples," says Origen, "when compared with the multitudes, whom the plain and unadorned doctrines of the Gospel have turned from dissipation to sobriety, from dishonesty to justice, from timidity to bold contempt of death for the sake of religion."* That which we call the word of God makes the sensual pure, the proud humble, the revengeful forgiving, the selfish disinterested, the sullen and morose, courteous and kind. Its efficacy cannot be better described than in the well known words of Lactantius: "Give me an angry, abusive passionate man; and with a few of the words of God, I will render him as meek as a lamb. Give me an avaricious and niggardly man; and I will return him liberal, and with unsparing hand distributing his money. Give me a man who is afraid of pain and death; and he shall presently contemn crosses, fires, and torments of every kind. Give me a lustful, adulterous, lecherous man; and you shall see him sober, chaste, continent. Give me a cruel and blood-thirsty man; his fury shall be instantly changed into clemency. Give me a man who is unjust, foolish, and a notorious offender; and he shall immediately become equitable, prudent and innocent. So great is the force of Divine wisdom, that when infused into the breast it expels, by a single effort, folly, the mother of sins."† Such moral miracles it hath wrought in every age; and as there are many dead, so there are not a few living witnesses of its irresistible power. Hence it is compared to a light which dispels our darkness; to a fire which kindles our affections; to a hammer, which breaks our hearts in pieces; to a two-edged sword which pierces into the inmost recesses of the soul; to a seed which changes our nature, and renders us fruitful in holiness.

Perhaps it may not be improper to introduce, in this place, for the illustration of the present argument, a comparison between the manners of heathen and Christian nations. I know, indeed, that in the opinion of those who have been accustomed to hear, and are so simple as to believe, the insidious declarations of infidels, and the loose panegyrics of some ill-informed or ill-advised friends of revelation, the comparison will rather be unfavorable to our purpose. The virtues of certain heathen nations are celebrated in the highest strains, with an evident design to insinuate, that, with the light of nature alone, which we pronounce to be insufficient, they have attained a degree of moral excellence unequalled by those who enjoy the boasted advantages of the gospel.‡ With the same intention, some characters in the Gentile world

* Vide Orig. contra Celsum, Lib. iii. p. 152. † Vide Lactant. Lib. iii. cap. 25.

‡ Much has been said in praise of the virtues of the Chinese; a people, concerning whom, even after the late British and Dutch embassies, we have only imperfect information. We have learned, however, that about 2000 children, according to other accounts 3000, are annually exposed in the streets of Pekin; and we may judge of the state of manners in China from the saying of one of its philosophers, that he would consider as a prodigy of virtue the man, who being alone with a woman should

have been commended with the utmost extravagance of praise. The testimony of the ancients, who were best acquainted with their history, affirming that those men were guilty of the most abominable crimes, is either passed over in silence, or without evidence and even the least shadow of proof, represented as false and calumnious. The vices of christians are collected with malignant industry, and exhibited in all their aggravations. Yet when declamation is set aside, and facts only are attended to, the balance will incline, in favor of Christian nations. A man who should practice sodomy, encourage prostitution, and almost in every sentence profane the name of God, would be abhorred by us as a monster; though such a man was admired by the Gentiles as a paragon of virtue.* There were several enormous evils which disgraced the most celebrated nations of antiquity, but which are now either entirely abolished, or have received a check, and exist, not as in former times under the protection and countenance of law, but in contempt of its authority, or by eluding its vigilance; such as pederasty, the exposing of children, domestic slavery, the cruel and murderous shows of the amphitheatre, a community of wives, and fornication, which some philosophers recommended by their example and their precepts. I may add, that, in Christian nations, there is a spirit of beneficence unknown during the reign of heathenism, which is displayed in the erection of infirmaries, hospitals, almshouses, charity schools, &c., and in the ready and liberal relief which is afforded to the necessitous and unfortunate. No man, I am persuaded, whose ideas of morality are enlarged and refined, will think the assertion extravagant, or incapable of the most satisfactory proof, that it would be easy to find in a Christian country, even among its peasants and mechanics, thousands, with whom the most accomplished philosopher of heathenism might blush to be compared.

not offer violence to her. From such competitors, Christian nations have nothing to fear. It is curious, that the high virtues of this nation should appear only in the writings of some infidel philosophers who were never out of Europe; while almost all the travelers agree in charging them with the meanest and most odious vices. There is the same contradiction between the fine descriptions, which are sometimes given of the innocence and simplicity of the natives of India, and the plain, unembellished accounts of those who have lived among them, and witnessed their manners. We are assured by the latter, that they are a very depraved people; and the more intimately we are acquainted with the history of heathen nations, the more fully shall we be convinced of the truth of this charge, brought against the Gentiles in general, that they "walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;" and that "being past feeling, they have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Eph. iv. 17—19.

* Look at the following picture of a virtuous man among the ancient heathens, drawn not by the hand of a Christian, who might have been suspected of having distorted the features and deepened the shades, but by the faithful pencil of an infidel. "I think," says Mr. Hume, "I have fairly made it appear, that an Athenian man of merit might be such a one as with us would pass for incestuous, a parricide, an assassin, an ungrateful, perjured traitor, and something else too abominable to be named; not to mention his rusticity and ill manners. And having lived in this manner, his death might be entirely suitable. He might conclude the scene by a desperate act of self-murder, and die with the most absurd blasphemies in his mouth. And notwithstanding all this, he shall have statutes, if not altars, erected to his memory; poems and orations shall be composed in his praise; great sects shall be proud of calling themselves by his name, and the most distant posterity shall blindly continue their admiration: Though were such a one to arise among themselves, they would justly regard him with horror and execration." *Hume's Essays*, vol. ii. p. 399.

The improvement of our manners cannot be attributed to our improvements in sciences and arts; for it hath been uniformly observed, that the progress of nations in refinement is accompanied with a correspondent progress in luxury and dissipation. Our superior morals are the consequence of a more perfect law; of precepts inculcated, and principles inspired, by revelation. Christianity hath established a new, and more exalted standard of virtue. The examples which it proposes for our imitation, are nobler than those of pagan philosophy; its instructions are purer and more sublime; its motives are better fitted to work upon the affections of the soul. That there is much immorality in Christian nations is indeed to be lamented; but it is no more than we had reason to expect, since our religion does not operate as a charm, without the knowledge and concurrence of the person in whose case it is employed; but as a medicine, which cures those alone by whom it is taken. If men will not attend to its evidence, nor acquaint themselves with its doctrines and motives, but reject it at the suggestion of prejudice and fashion; or, while they profess to believe it, suffer their minds to be diverted from it, by the cares and pleasures of life; they are not more within the sphere of its actual influence, in consequence of their moral circumstances, than if they lived in a country, on which the Gospel hath never shed its salutary rays. We know at the same time, that manners have always been most pure, when the Scriptures were most studied and revered; and it is singular, that the greatest atrocities in modern times have been perpetrated by a nation, which in its public character had renounced Christianity, and in which the sacred books had long been unknown, or despised.

This comparison will perhaps seem a digression. To bring the argument, therefore, to a conclusion, the effects wrought by the Scriptures being manifestly such as no human means have ever been observed to produce, is it not consonant to sound reason, to acknowledge as their author, Almighty God, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, and turns them as the rivers of waters? That must be his word, which operates with irresistible power, and works a change so great in the frame, and dispositions, and exercises of the soul, that it is fitly represented as a second creation. The propriety of this inference is still more apparent from a review of the nature of that change. All the energy of the Scriptures is displayed in making men better; in removing their imperfections; in inspiring them with pious affections towards God, and benevolent dispositions towards their brethren; in improving their moral faculties, and transforming them into the likeness of Him who created them. Their whole force is exerted in restoring that state of innocence and purity, which, tradition informs us, was the original state of mankind; and in which alone our reason pronounces to be agreeable to the moral attributes of God, to have placed his intelligent offspring. Here then his finger is perceived; and we conclude that from him hath proceeded that book, which conducts us to himself, and by reproducing his holy image in our souls, qualifies us for his service in this world, and for the enjoyment of his presence and love in the next.

V. The harmony of the scriptures supplies a fifth argument in proof of their inspiration.

A religion devised by men, a system of philosophy, or a code of

laws, will undergo, in the course of a few centuries, very great alterations, in consequence of new discoveries, and changes in ideas and manners. Opinions and maxims, which were once in high repute, will be exploded; and principles and practices of modern date, will be substituted in their room. Such, on examination, is the actual history of the human mind and its productions. False religions, which have had some continuance, are found, when viewed at two distant periods, to have varied in dogmas and observances, in the objects and forms of their worship. Schemes of philosophy appear and vanish like the transient modes of fashion; and principles, of which the truth was not questioned in one age, are discarded as foolish and absurd in another. In the Scriptures, we see a religion of which one fundamental article hath not been changed, during the long period of several thousand years. The Christian worships the same God, confides in the same Mediator, obeys the same moral precepts, and expects the same immortality, as the Israelite did in the wilderness, or the patriarch before the flood.

In a collection of the writings of authors, who lived in very distant ages, and different states of society, it is impossible that there should not be several contradictions, if the subject of which they treat be the same. Their capacities, their modes of life, their information, their views, their dispositions, being exceedingly diversified, it could not be expected, that, if permitted to give free scope to their thoughts, they would, in every point, exactly agree. The Bible consists of the writings of men, who appeared in very distant periods of the world; for from Moses the first, to John the last of them, there is a long interval of more than fifteen hundred years. The writers, consequently, lived in very different states of society, and were familiarized to very different manners and opinions. As man is, in a great degree, the creature of circumstances; as his soul receives impressions from surrounding objects, and takes the form of the situation in which he is placed, their views of many subjects must have been various, like the modes of thinking which prevailed in the times when they respectively flourished. Hence we might have looked for the same diversity on the subject of religion. It was natural that the ideas of the more early writers should be rude and inaccurate, when compared with the ideas of those who lived in a more enlightened and refined state of society; and that their representations of the Divine Being, and the nature of our duty to him, should be accommodated to the manners and taste of their contemporaries. Besides, there was a similar diversity in their education and rank, some of them being princes and rulers, and others the lowest of the people; some of them being learned, and others illiterate. The sentiments of the great and the vulgar, of philosophers and mechanics, usually differ as much, especially on abstract subjects, such as many of the doctrines of religion are, as the sentiments of a polished and a barbarous age.

Notwithstanding these considerations, from which we might have expected to find the Bible full of contradictions, we observe in it, with no small astonishment, the most perfect harmony in sentiment and design, though it contain the writings of more than thirty different authors. All the prophets agree in predicting a person, who by some of them is styled the Messiah, and by them all is described as the Saviour of his people;

and their ideas of his dignity, his humiliation, his sufferings, and his glory, are in exact unison with those which are detailed by the evangelists. The whole of the New Testament, indeed, agrees with the Old, as being a fulfilment of its types, promises, and predictions. In the writers, whether of the former or of the present dispensation, we meet with the same representations of the character and perfections of the Deity ; the same plan laid down for the restoration of sinful men to his favor ; the same views of the nature and blessings of redemption, though in one place the language may be figurative, and in another place, plain ; the same method pointed out of enjoying an interest in those blessings ; the same vices condemned, and the same virtues enjoined. The religion which they teach, is in substance the same ; the only alteration which we observe, is in its external form ; and for that alteration such reasons are assigned, as exempt God from the charge of mutability, and the sacred writers from the charge of contradiction. In fact, the introduction of a new dispensation having been announced by the prophets, not to overthrow, but to perfect the dispensation under which they lived, had not the ceremonial law been abolished, the New Testament would have been at variance with the Old ; and we should have searched in vain for evidences of Divine wisdom, in the continuance of institutions, which were become useless and unmeaning, because their end was accomplished. Some instances, indeed, in which it is pretended that the inspired writers contradict themselves or one another, have been industriously collected and pompously displayed, in order to disprove the Divinity of the Scriptures. As I purpose to consider the objection drawn from this topic in the next chapter, it is at present only necessary to observe, that the alleged contradictions do not affect the grand doctrines and principles of the Scriptures, but only some subordinate and less important matters ; and that, after all, with a little diligence and attention, they may be reconciled.

It must be acknowledged, that a number of individuals, by a previous arrangement of their plan, and mutual communication in the course of executing it, might compose a work, which should exhibit perfect unity of thought and design. It is certain, at the same time, that such an attempt could rarely succeed ; and that, if they should endeavor to impose their work upon the world, as the production of one man, the fraud could hardly fail to be detected by some means or other. The harmony of the sacred writers cannot be suspected to be the result of a well-concerted scheme to give to a fable the air and the consistency of truth, because they lived, as we have seen, not at one time, but in different ages, and by consequence could be under no engagement to co-operate, nor have any common purpose to accomplish. They could never meet to contrive a plan, nor to give an uniform appearance to the parts which they had separately executed. As, then, they could not write in concert ; as, notwithstanding the detached character and absolute freedom of the writers, (freedom, I mean, from the restraint which human authority, or a previous stipulation might have laid upon their thoughts) their works most perfectly harmonize ; as it would be a proof of insanity to suppose that their harmony, since it could not be the effect of design, was the result of accident ; is it not manifest that they were guided by one and the same Spirit, namely, the Spirit of Truth, who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever ? When the laws of nature are suspended in the moral and intellectual world, we have equal reason to

infer an interposition of the Deity, as when there is a suspension of its physical laws. If then a number of persons, who would have differed much had they acted according to their native genius and dispositions, unite most cordially in all their views, we must consider them, as in that case, subject to a supernatural influence, by which their minds are moulded and fashioned alike. Those pens which have described letters so exactly similar, must have been guided by the same hand; those instruments, which conspire to form so sweet a concord, must have been tuned by the same artist. The spirit of error and imposture could not, in such circumstances, have assumed the distinguishing attribute of truth, immutability.

VI. The last argument for the Inspiration of the Scriptures, is founded in their wonderful, and I may add, miraculous preservation.

The sacred books of the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and other ancient nations, have perished, though no means were ever used to destroy them. The leaves of the Sybil have long since been scattered by the winds;* and of her oracles, which were consulted with such reverence, and preserved with such superstitious care, I know not whether a fragment remain. Those which are quoted by the fathers are clumsy fabrications of some Christian, more zealous than honest. It is more than three thousand years since the first of our sacred books, and nearly two thousand since the last of them was written; and yet not one of them, nor even, I may venture to assert, a single sentence of them hath been lost. Very ancient books, it must be acknowledged, have come down to us through a long succession of ages; but their case, when attentively considered, will appear to be very different from that of the Scriptures. Against those books no person had conceived any ill-will, nor did any man feel himself interested in suppressing them, because they neither contradicted his prejudices, nor opposed any obstacle to the gratification of his passions, and the success of his schemes; whereas kings and emperors, both before, and since the coming of Christ, have been the determined enemies of the Scriptures, and have employed all their authority and the utmost severity of persecution, to accomplish their destruction. Antiochus Epiphanes, in the prosecution of his design to establish the idolatrous worship of the Greeks, in Judea, caused all the copies of the law which could be found, to be burnt, and forbade under the penalty of death, any Jew to retain the Scriptures in his possession.† The furious persecution of Diocletian commenced by an order to demolish the churches of the Christians, and burn the Scriptures.§ Bishops and presbyters were cruelly tortured to constrain them to deliver up their sacred books; and those, who were overcome by fear or pain, received from their more courageous and indignant brethren, the infamous appellation of *traditors*. Besides the lusts of men have, in all ages, been

* Vid. Virgilii *Æneid*. Lib. iii. lin. 441—452.

† Large collections of various readings of the Scriptures have been made by the industry of critics. But of these, some are merely conjectural; others are absurdly, in my opinion, taken from ancient versions; others are trifling, as they relate to syllables and words of little moment, and are undeserving, therefore, of the pains with which they have been gathered, and the pomp with which they are displayed; and the most important of them do not deprive us of one article of faith, nor establish any heresy or error.

‡ 1 Maccab. i. 56, 57.

§ Vide Euseb. Lib. viii. cap. 2. Lactan. de mortibus persecutorum, cap. 12.

t war with the Scriptures ; and the patrons of heresies and errors have experienced them to be the chief impediments to the progress and triumph of their opinions. Their hand, to allude to the description of shamael, hath been against all ungodly men, who held the truth in unrighteousness ; and it was natural, therefore, that the hands of all ungodly men should be against them. A book which pronounced the wisdom of the world to be folly, treated its most serious and important pursuits as childish and criminal, and branded with the odious name of vice its favorite indulgences, was likely to be proscribed with indignation, and persecuted with unrelenting revenge.

Amidst so many enemies, we could not have been surprised, if the Bible had shared the fate of many other books once venerated, and reputed Divine, which have long since disappeared. Surely, had it been a work of man, its memorial must have perished from the earth. But of its preservation amidst the dangers which threatened it, we ourselves are witnesses. With whatever earnestness multitudes may have wished to destroy a book, which thwarted their measures, and disturbed them in the practice of iniquity, few have been so daring as to lay their sacrilegious hands upon it ; those who have been guilty of this audacious attempt, have been disappointed in their hopes, whether they aimed at its total destruction, or at the adulteration of its contents ; and it remains to this day an object of veneration and dread to the very men, whose errors it condemns, and against whose evil ways it denounces the righteous vengeance of heaven. Notwithstanding the triumph of Arianism, we still meet with all those passages, which were ever alleged to prove the equality of the Son with the Father ; and though for several ages Antichrist reigned in the plenitude of power, and enjoyed the most favorable opportunities, amidst the gross ignorance and unsuspecting credulity of mankind, to corrupt the Scriptures, we are able from them alone, without the aid of the writings of the fathers, to convict the church of Rome of apostacy, and to prove its peculiar doctrines and usages to be false and superstitious. Not one jot or one tittle of revelation hath perished.

The care, then, of Divine Providence with regard to the Scriptures is manifest. We see the hand of God preserving them from all injury with incessant vigilance ; and we infer, that they are a revelation of his will, and the only means, by which men can attain the true knowledge of his nature and counsels, and of the acceptable manner of serving him. The patronage which God hath afforded to this book is a testimony that he recognizes it as his own. Had it been a human composition, Providence would not have lent its aid to support its impious pretensions, and to make an imposture pass in the world as a genuine revelation from the Father of lights. " It is apparent," says an eminent divine, " that God in all ages hath had a great regard unto it, and acted his power and care in its preservation. Were not the Bible what it pretends to be, there had been nothing more suitable to the nature of God, and more becoming Divine Providence, than long since to have blotted it out of the world. For to suffer a book to be in the world, from the *beginning of times*, falsely pretending his name and authority, seducing so great a portion of mankind into a pernicious and ruinous apostacy from him, as it must do, and doth, if it be not of a Divine origin, and exposing inconceivable multitudes of the best, wisest, and

soberest among them, unto all sorts of bloody miseries which they have undergone in the behalf of it, seems not so consonant unto that infinite goodness, wisdom, and care, wherewith this world is governed from above. But, on the contrary, whereas the malicious craft of Satan, and the prevalent power and rage of mankind hath combined, and been set at work, to the ruin and utter suppression of this book, proceeding sometimes so far as that there was no appearing way for its escape; yet, through the watchful care and providence of God, sometimes putting itself forth in *miraculous instances*, it hath been preserved unto this day, and shall be so to the consummation of all things.*

These are the general arguments, which I proposed to bring forward in favor of the Inspiration of the Scriptures. They are of sufficient strength to establish the point, independently of any other proof; but when added to the particular arguments advanced in support of the Divinity of the Old and the New Testament, they compose a body of evidence, which cannot fail to remove the doubts of every candid inquirer, and to obtain his assent to the important truth, which it hath been the design of the foregoing chapters to illustrate and confirm.

CHAPTER VII.

Objections against the Inspiration of the Scriptures.

By the arguments in the preceding chapters, it may be expected, that a conviction of the Divine authority of the Scriptures will be produced in the mind of every unprejudiced and attentive reader. But though freedom from prejudice be indispensably requisite to an impartial investigation of any subject in debate, and there be no qualification of which infidels talk and boast so much, even insinuating, or boldly asserting, that they alone are possessed of it; yet there are no persons in the world more evidently under the influence of prepossession than they are, when any question relative to revelation is discussed. Their prejudices are of two kinds, and may be properly termed intellectual and moral. Certain preconceived notions concerning the Divine character and administrations, and the perfection of the human understanding, which are incompatible with the revelation contained in the Scriptures, and indeed, with the very idea of a revelation, determine them to reject it without taking time to ponder, with calmness and deliberation, the evidences in its favor. They think themselves authorized to treat the evidences as insufficient, without even waiting till they be laid before them; as a man may safely refuse to hear arguments against axioms, or self-evident principles, because he is sure that they must be sophistical. They do not examine whether their preconceived notions be true; but assuming their truth as incontrovertible, they pronounce the doctrine which contradicts them to be false, and by consequence, to be the offspring of ignorance or imposture. But these are not the only, nor perhaps the

* Dr. Owen's Reason of Faith, page 29, 30.

rongest prejudices, by which the minds of infidels are warped. Those which originate in the state of the heart, in its inclinations and affections, are the most powerful, and contribute in an effectual, though imperceptible manner, to pervert the understanding. There are certain liberties which men are naturally fond of indulging; mortifications for which they feel the utmost aversion and horror; pleasures on which they rush with an impetuosity, to which reason and prudence oppose their dictates in vain. If revelation restrain those liberties, enjoin those mortifications, and condemn those pleasures, it is not surprising that it should meet with an unfriendly reception. When it comes to claim the love and homage of the heart, it finds it preoccupied. That infidels are naturally or constitutionally more depraved than other men, it would be foolish to assert, nor do I even believe that they are all licentious in their manners; but while the more sober part, who are comparatively few, are misled by the prejudices of the understanding, the conduct of a great majority discovers, that their hostility to the Scriptures springs from the corrupt passions of their hearts. It is not difficult to divine, why the authority of a book, which inculcates the purest lessons of virtue, is called in question by the votaries of vice.

From the source of prejudice flow all the objections against revelation, which occur in the conversation and writings of infidels. Right reason has little, or rather no concern in suggesting them. Some of these objections it will now be proper to consider, because they frequently come in our way, and it is wise to have answers to them ready for the preservation of the peace of our own minds, and the defence and honor of the truth. Living in the midst of enemies, we should have our weapons always in our hands. The objections are of two kinds. Some are intended to disprove a Divine revelation in general; while the more particular aim of others is to show, that those books, which Jews and Christians receive as sacred, are falsely said to be inspired. I shall take notice only of the chief objections; and from the case with which they are repelled, the reader will be able to judge, how insignificant the other cavils of infidelity must be.

I. The first argument against the Inspiration of the Scriptures, is founded in this general principle, that the light of nature is sufficient to teach us our duty, and to conduct us to happiness. Were this principle true, it is evident, that a revelation would be altogether unnecessary; and, by consequence, that, as God never interposes but for some end worthy of his wisdom, the Scriptures were not dictated by his Spirit, but are the work of men, who have given to their own productions the name of his oracles. As this principle is the basis on which infidelity rests, and one of the chief causes why the authority of the Scriptures is so violently contested, we shall bestow particular attention upon it.

By the light of nature, must be meant those discoveries of the perfections and the will of God, which are afforded by the works of creation and providence, in connexion with the ability or power of unassisted reason, to trace those discoveries, and draw from them the proper conclusions. It is plain, that whatever inferences are deducible from the divine works and dispensations, if our minds be too feeble to deduce them, we are precisely in the same situation, as if we were not furnished with the premises; and we stand in need of a teacher, or a book to point them out to our attention. The objection supposes that every

man in the world, may, without any assistance from others, acquire, by the exercise of his own faculties, just notions of God, and his duty, and his final destination; for if this ability be possessed only by a few, a revelation is manifestly useful, and even necessary to the rest, whom their more enlightened brethren might neglect to instruct, or who might refuse to receive instructions from them, because they were possessed of no authority to which their equals, in all other respects, were bound to submit. Nothing could be more absurd, than to assert, in general terms, the sufficiency of the light of nature, as a reason why a revelation is not needed, while it is understood to be sufficient only for some individuals, endowed with extraordinary capacity, and favored with uncommon advantages, for the investigation of truth. But that every person in the world is possessed of the ability supposed in the objection, is so glaringly false, that no man will venture to affirm it, unless he be so grossly ignorant of the history of mankind, as to be unworthy of our notice, or so dishonest, as to advance as a fact, what he knows to be capable of an easy and complete refutation.

To prove that the boasted light of nature is not sufficient to conduct men to happiness, I might appeal to the instances of the Hottentots, and the natives of New Holland, who, in intellectual capacity and moral attainments, are but in a small degree superior to brutes. Perhaps it will be said, that the appeal is not fair, because in those tribes the powers of the human mind are almost extinguished, having never been roused and improved by civilization. But if the light of nature be sufficient, it is surely sufficient for nature's children; and I know of none who so well deserve this character, as those, who in their intellectual and moral features, are just such as nature formed them, having undergone no alteration to the worse or to the better by art, or by tradition. If we wish to judge of the strength of unassisted reason, in order to ascertain whether it be sufficient for all, let us observe its operations in the rudest savages.

If, however, the objectors mean, that the light of nature is sufficient, only when men are polished by science and social institutions, they unwittingly grant, that to a great portion of mankind, it always was, and still is, insufficient, and consequently, that they need a revelation; and besides, even with this limitation, its insufficiency may be satisfactorily demonstrated. It is a fact which cannot be disputed, that no people, ancient or modern, who had only the light of nature to guide them in their researches, have attained to the true knowledge and pure profession of the unity of God; or have formed such notions of his worship, as were suitable to his majesty, holiness, and spirituality; or have composed a complete system of morality, founded in just principles, and enforced by sanctions of such efficacy, as to ensure obedience to its precepts; or have established by convincing arguments, the doctrine of the future existence of the soul. The polytheism, the idolatry, the superstitious rites, the immoralities in principle as well as in practice, the childish ideas on the subject of religion, and the doubts, with respect to a state beyond the grave, of the Greeks and Romans, without controversy the most accomplished of all heathen nations, are known to every person acquainted with the writings of their historians, poets, and philosophers. Nay, a single individual cannot be mentioned among all the men of learning and science in the Pagan world, who ever held

e truths of religion which are discoverable by reason, unmixed, with contrary errors, or yielded to them an undoubting, unwavering assent. Read Cicero's first Tusculan disputation, and the conclusion of the *Polology* of Socrates by Plato; and you will find these men, than whom antiquity produced none greater, speaking with hesitation on the immortality of the soul. Now, if these things be as we have represented them, why do we hear so much of the sufficiency of the light of nature, when a single instance, in which it hath proved sufficient, cannot be pointed out? One is at a loss to determine, whether the unmeaning exclamations of infidels on this subject, best deserve the frown of disapprobation, or the smile of derision. It is surely most ridiculous, to talk of a power as sufficient to produce certain effects, though, in every trial to produce them, it have failed.

Perplexed with doubts, and sensible of the weakness of their reason, the heathens themselves have acknowledged the necessity of a Divine revelation. Hence arose those oracles so famous among them, which they consulted in cases of difficulty; and from the same source flowed the stories, so widely circulated, and so firmly believed, of the intercourse of their priests and legislators with the gods, from whom they received political and religious institutions. Pretences to Divine revelation would not have gained credit, if a consciousness of ignorance had not created a desire for supernatural instruction. It was not by the vulgar alone that this desire was entertained and expressed. Philosophers themselves, on some occasions, confessed the darkness of their minds, and signified their hopes that a teacher would appear, "to take away the mist from their eyes." The words of Socrates, in a conversation with Alcibiades, on the duties of religious worship, in which he represents men as very apt through ignorance to err, are truly remarkable: "To me it seems best to be quiet: for it is necessary to wait till we learn how we ought to behave towards the gods, and towards men. When," says Alcibiades, "will that time come; and who is he that will instruct us? for most gladly would I see this man, who he is. He is one," answers Socrates, "who cares for you;" but he insinuates that his coming would be delayed for a time, and informs Alcibiades, that some preparation was necessary on his part.* It is impossible to ascertain what was the precise meaning of Socrates in this singular passage. There is no ground for supposing it to be a prediction of Christ. But without enquiring whether he did or did not understand himself, we may confidently pronounce it to be expressive of a conviction entertained by the greatest philosopher in antiquity, of the necessity of a Divine revelation. Is it not, then, very surprising, that though the Gentiles, wished for a revelation, some men should now rise up, and maintain that their wishes were foolish, because they were able, without any foreign aid, to acquire a perfect knowledge of their duty, and of the means of attaining felicity? It is equally strange as if a man in health, or rather a man, who, in the delirium of a fever, supposed himself in health, should tell another, who was sick and dying, that his complaints were groundless, and his cries for a physician preposterous; or that he felt no pain, and needed no medicine.

Perhaps infidels will allege, in proof of the sufficiency of reason,

* Vid. Platonis Alcibiad. ii.

that they can produce a system of natural religion complete in all its parts, and supported by incontestible evidence. But to what cause shall we attribute their superiority to the sages of antiquity? Are they wiser than Socrates, whom the oracle pronounced to be the wisest of men; or of a genius more sublime than Plato; or more accurate and penetrating than Aristotle? Their modesty, which, by the by, is not commonly their most distinguished quality, will make them decline the comparison. Does nature now speak with a louder voice, and are her lessons written in more legible characters? Do the Divine perfections shine forth with brighter lustre, and is the duty of man more obviously and strikingly delineated? No: creation presents the same aspect, and proclaims the same truths at present as in former times; and reason hath not acquired any new power of investigating them. But the circumstances of our modern infidels, and of the philosophers of antiquity, are exceedingly different. The latter felt their way amidst the dubious twilight of nature, while the former walk in the sunshine of revelation. When an infidel boasts of the clearness and extent of his ideas, on the subject of natural religion, he is a dwarf mounted on the shoulders of a giant, and vaunting that he sees farther than a man of ordinary stature. He is a thief, impudently attempting to rival or eclipse the splendor of another man, by a display of those riches which he hath previously purloined from him. It is to the Scriptures that he is indebted for the greater perfection of his system. They have pointed out and illustrated the doctrines which it contains, and supplied the arguments by which it is confirmed. Of the truth of this assertion we need no other proof than the single consideration, that there never was a rational scheme of religion framed in any country, which was not enlightened by the Gospel. Now as the highest perfection of reason is connected, in point of time and place, with the propagation of the Gospel, it is agreeable to the dictates of common sense to believe, that reason is indebted for its best discoveries to the aid of revelation.

Though, however, it were granted that reason is perfect, and can discover all that nature teaches concerning God and our duty; yet, if we be in a fallen state, depraved and guilty, as the heathens themselves have acknowledged, and an impartial view of the present moral condition of mankind will not suffer us to deny, the same knowledge will not suffice us, which would have been sufficient in a state of innocence. We need to know whether God will pardon our offences, and on what terms he will pardon them; and it is manifest that on these points none can give us information but himself. No man can tell whether a king will forgive such of his subjects as have rebelled against his authority; and, if he be willing to forgive them, on what conditions he will grant them an indemnity, and receive them into favor, till he have proclaimed his intentions. The laws, under which those subjects lived before their rebellion, denounce punishment, but give no hope of mercy. On the supposition of a remedial scheme, or a Divine interposition in our favor, there must be new duties incumbent upon us, of which the light of nature could give us no notice, because they are the result of a new dispensation. The objection, therefore, against revelation, founded in the pretended sufficiency of reason, is destitute of any force, because it falsely supposes us to be in the same condition in which we were originally placed; whereas the very light of nature, which is set in opposition

to revelation, concurs with it in assuring us, that we have lost our primitive rectitude, and fallen under the wrath of our Creator.

II. It is asserted, that the Scriptures do not contain a Divine revelation, and therefore are not inspired, because they have been communicated to so small a portion of the human race. It seems to those who urge this objection, to be inconsistent with the goodness of God, the common Father of mankind, to confine his favors to one nation, or to a few nations, while all stand in equal need of them. But the Scriptures of the Old Testament were delivered to the Jews alone, who were as nothing in point of population and accomplishments, when compared with the nations around them; and the Christian doctrine, though it breathe a Catholic spirit, is not known by more than a fifth, or a sixth part of mankind. It is, therefore, equally absurd to consider the Bible as having been dictated by the Spirit of God, as having emanated from the impartial and benevolent Author of the human race, as to suppose him to have created a sun, which should enlighten only one region, or at the most one quarter of the globe.

But this objection, though it may pass with superficial thinkers for an unanswerable one, will be found on examination to be feeble and nugatory. Revelation presupposes men to be in a fallen state of ignorance and depravity; for if they were still in the same circumstances in which their Creator placed them, they would need no other guide but the light which shines in his works, and that reason which he hath imparted to their minds. But if men be in a fallen state, into which they must evidently have been brought by their own fault, they have no claim to any expression of the goodness of God; if they have extinguished or obscured the light of reason, they have no title to expect that the abuse of one favor will be remedied by the gift of another. It depended, therefore, on the sovereign pleasure of God, whether he should grant a revelation or not; and if he did grant it, he was surely at liberty to do what he would with his own; to bestow it on few, or on many, as should seem meet to his wisdom, which alone could determine what was fit to be done. A claim to an equal distribution can only be founded in equal rights, and would be arrogant and ridiculous, where no right existed in any of the claimants, and the distribution was perfectly gratuitous. To say, then, that the Scriptures are not a Divine revelation, because all men did not enjoy the benefit of their instruction, is to maintain that God is bound to exercise his goodness alike to all, at the very time when we proceed on the supposition, that all are destitute of a title to it.

If the argument, that the Scriptures are not from God, because they have not been universally published, were good, it would likewise prove that he has no concern in those dispensations, which none but atheists will deny to be Divine. Though God be related to every individual in the world as his Creator, and all men may say with truth they are his offspring, we do not see him making an equal distribution of his favors in the course of his providence. All do not possess the same advantages of soil and climate. All have not the same degrees of strength and beauty. All do not enjoy the same means of moral and intellectual improvement. Nay, to instance in that idol, which infidels wish to elevate on the ruins of revelation, all men are not endowed with the powers of reason in equal perfection. Some are born idiots; some are extremely dull and slow of apprehension; some are incapable of proceeding more

than a few steps in the investigation of truth ; while others, when compared with them, seem to be beings of a superior order. There would be the same propriety, therefore, in affirming that reason is not from God, because it is communicated in such different portions, and to some, namely, idiots, is not communicated at all, as that the Scriptures are not Divine, because there are many nations to whom they have not been made known. We may even proceed a step farther, and observe, that as it is by reason that we perceive the truths of natural theology, these, in consequence of its inequality, must be perceived in very unequal degrees of extent and evidence, and in some cases will not be perceived at all. The truths of natural religion, therefore, are not within the reach of all men, any more than those of revelation ; whence it follows, by necessary consequence, that if the reasoning in the objection be just, the former is not from God any more than the latter. But an argument which proves too much, proves in effect nothing but the heedlessness and blind eagerness of the person who advances it ; and the deist who urges this objection, overturns his own system, in his zeal to destroy Christianity. Perhaps most infidels will not be alarmed at this consequence, as it is manifest from their conduct, that they hardly believe even the religion of nature, and that they feel the most perfect indifference for it ; but every man, it is hoped, whose understanding and heart are not debauched, will tremble to employ such reasoning against the Scripture, as leads directly to atheism.

It is the greatest folly imaginable to call in question the Divine authority of the Scriptures, because they have not been published as extensively, as in our opinion a Divine revelation should be. It is arrogant to demand, that our views of what is right and fit should be the standard of the dispensations of providence and grace. Were we to sit down, and contrive a plan for the government of the world, it would be exceedingly different from that which is actually pursued. We would probably propose, in the overflowing of our benevolence, that all men should enjoy in equal portions, reason, health, and the various necessities and comforts of life ; and we would exclude as a stain upon the workmanship of God, men emaciated with poverty, and loathsome with disease, and above all, beings in human shape, devoid of human understanding. We would resolve to remove every evil out of the universe, and to diffuse every where the greatest possible good. But this system of unmixed beneficence, as we would call it, is not realized. The world, as it is disposed and managed by infallible wisdom and unbounded goodness, presents a very different aspect. Now, if a plan of governing the world different from ours, and even contrary to it, be consistent with the benevolence and justice of the Deity, may it not be equally consistent with these attributes that the knowledge and benefits of a remedial scheme should be extended only to some ? If we think it right, that since such a scheme is alike needful to all, is should be universally published, let us remember, that, in other instances, our notions of what is fit and good are contradicted by that state of things, which God himself hath ordained. And certainly, laying prejudice and passion aside, infidels themselves will acknowledge it to be unspeakably better, that some should enjoy a revelation, on the supposition of its necessity, which we have already proved, than that the whole human race should be irrevocably left in ignorance and misery. Nothing can exceed the folly of

refusing a gift of inestimable value, and without which it is impossible for us to be happy, because it is not presented to others who stand in equal need of it.

III. It is objected, that the Scriptures are not a revelation from God, and by consequence are falsely believed to be inspired, on this ground, that a revelation is incapable of being proved at all, or of being proved to any but those to whom it is immediately delivered. Hence, as God does nothing in vain, we cannot suppose him to have made a declaration of his will, and to have ordered it to be committed to writing, while there was no valuable end to be gained, as few or none could ever know that he was in truth the Author of it. This, and the first objection are of the nature of arguments *a priori*, and conclude against the Scriptures in particular, from the pretended impossibility of any revelation whatever. The objection is founded in one or other of these suppositions, that a miracle is impossible; or that, though a miracle were wrought, we could have no assurance of it by any other means than the evidence of sense, and it would therefore serve as a proof to those alone who were eye-witnesses; or that miracles are not sufficient to prove the truth of a doctrine.

The first of these suppositions is so manifestly false, that we can with difficulty conceive it possible for any person seriously to make it. If the laws of nature were established by God, and be in fact only the particular modes in which he is pleased to exert his power, he who wills that events should take place in a certain order to-day, may will them to take place in a different order to-morrow, provided that there be a sufficient reason for the change. But some men seem to labor under this childish mistake, that because we speak of the *laws* of nature, there are in truth certain laws, which even the Deity himself cannot alter or suspend. Or, if this absurd and atheistical idea be not the foundation of their arguments against the possibility of miracles, they must imagine it to be inconsistent with the dignity of the Divine character to make any change in a system once established as the best; not considering that true wisdom is displayed, not in pertinaciously adhering to a plan, whatever valuable ends might be gained by deviating from it, but in introducing such alterations as new circumstances may require. To say, that no cause could ever arise sufficient to induce the Creator of the Universe to suspend or alter his laws, is not to reason, but to beg the question in debate. It is at the same time to assert, that mere physical laws are of so sacred a nature, that no moral end, however important in itself, or extensive in its consequences, could compensate for the momentary infringement of them.

The second supposition, that we could have no certainty that miracles were wrought, unless we had witnessed them, is founded in the idea, that miracles are contrary to experience. Hence it is argued, that as it is not contrary to experience, that men should lie, we can never be sure that the reports of miracles are entitled to credit; or rather, that after balancing the evidence on both sides, we are bound to conclude all such reports to be false. This is the argument which Hume, with no great modesty, boasted, "would, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting rock to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently would be useful as long as the world endures. For so long, he presumes, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all history, sacred and

profane."⁹ But notwithstanding the triumph with which this redoubtable argument is announced, good reasoners will not hesitate to call it a sophism. A miracle is not contrary to my experience, unless having been present, when it is said to have been wrought, I had the evidence of my senses, that it was not wrought. It is not contrary to my experience, that a dead man rose from the grave, and inveterate diseases were cured by a word, seventeen hundred years ago; it is only different from what I experience at present, when it is confessed, that the age of miracles is past. The foundation, therefore, of this boasted argument is false. To say that a miracle is different from my experience, which in plain language is to say, that it is an event different from any which I have ever seen, will no more prove, that it was not wrought, than the want of experience with respect to the freezing of water, in those who live in hot climates, will prove that it does not freeze. The only effect which my want of experience can reasonably have, is to prevent me from hastily crediting the report of the miracle, and to make me insist on the most satisfactory evidence. It is certain, indeed, that it is not contrary to experience, that men should lie, for no person who has any knowledge of mankind, needs to be told that they lie often. It is, however, equally certain, that they more often speak truth, perhaps a hundred times for once that they lie, and experience, therefore, is in favor of their testimony: that is, if we will judge by the standard of experience, of the credibility of the testimony of others, as they speak truth frequently, and lie but seldom, we shall be inclined, in any particular instance, to presume, that their word deserves to be believed.

But, setting aside this precarious and unphilosophical mode of ascertaining the value of testimony, we know that there are circumstances, in which we may have the most perfect assurance of the veracity of others. For example, no reasonable man would refuse to give credit to testimony, if several witnesses agreed; if there were no contrary testimony; if it were plain, that the witnesses had no personal interest to serve: if it would evidently be their interest to be silent, or to maintain the reverse; if in adhering to their testimony, they exposed themselves to all the evils, which men, in other cases, most industriously avoid; and finally, if they sealed it with their blood. "The falsehood of their testimony, would, in these circumstances, be more miraculous than the event which they relate," though it were the greatest miracle recorded in the Scriptures; and, in this case, Hume himself allows, that they have a title to be credited.[†] It hath been already shown, that the testimony of the apostles concerning Jesus Christ, hath all the marks of veracity: and it hath likewise appeared, that we have such grounds for believing the miracles, said to have been performed by the writers of the Scriptures, that we cannot deny them, without renouncing our reason. I shall, therefore, only add in this place, that the improbability of a miracle is diminished, in proportion to the importance of the end, which is alleged as the reason of working it. When we are told of miracles wrought to prove that a bone is the bone of a saint, or that a certain image should be worshipped, we may disbelieve all such stories, not only because the miracles are brought forward in favor of superstition and idolatry, but because the occasion is too mean for the interposition of

⁹ Hume's Essays, vol. ii. p. 124.

[†] Hume's Essays, vol. ii. p. 130.

the Deity. But the report of miracles wrought to attest a revelation which was so much wanted, and which is evidently calculated to promote the best interests of mankind, has no appearance of falsehood and imposture; and we instantly perceive, that an interference, in a case of such magnitude, is highly worthy of infinite wisdom and benevolence.

But miracles, it is said, are incapable of proving a doctrine; and we are not warranted, therefore, to receive any doctrine which is not demonstrated by reason, or hath not been made known by an immediate revelation to ourselves. It hath been sagely asked, What connexion is there between truth and power? If this question deserved an answer, it would be easy to say in return to it, that in the case of men, there is an inseparable connexion between them, and that their power is often exerted in support of error; but that the moral perfections of God assure us, that in his dispensations they are necessarily and immutably connected; or, in other words, that his power is never displayed but in favor of truth. But this point requires more particular consideration.

The assertion that a doctrine cannot be proved by miracles, is very extraordinary. God, as the case supposes, may attest, in a visible manner, a person as a messenger from himself; for if miracles be not an attestation of the Divine commission of the person who performs them, what purpose do they serve? and yet it shall be impossible to know the truth of the doctrine delivered by him, without some other evidence besides this attestation. Here one would be tempted to exclaim against the unreasonableness of infidels, did not one recollect, that in this notion they are too much patronized by some Christian writers, who maintain that miracles alone are not sufficient to prove a revelation, and that we must likewise take into account the nature and tendency of its contents. Many plausible things are advanced, with regard to the impossibility of distinguishing true from false miracles, in consequence of our ignorance of the powers of nature, and of beings of a superior order.* Though, however, all this were granted to be true, the miracles wrought in favor of the revelation contained in the Scriptures would be sufficient to demonstrate it to be Divine, because some of them at least, as the raising of the dead, were manifestly of such a nature, as it is the prerogative of God alone to perform. But while I do not choose to affirm, that every true miracle was wrought by the immediate agency of the Deity himself, and am ready to allow, that in some instances, he might employ the ministry of angels, I deny that a true miracle can be performed by any created being, without his permission and concurrence. For admitting that angels, both good and bad, are possessed of power to produce such effects, as might appear to us miraculous, I know no opinion which reflects greater dishonor upon God than this, that he would suffer one of his own creatures, especially a depraved and malignant creature, who alone would make the attempt, to sport with the eternal interests of men, by performing such works in confirmation of a lie, as they could not, by attention and care, distinguish from his own interposition. This opinion destroys the moral government of the universe. Though we be unable to fix the limits between the power of creatures and that of God, we determine with precision what they cannot, but he can do; yet we may be certain from the perfections, which we know him to possess, that

* Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, p. 373—384.

he will impose such restraints upon them, that we shall not be at a loss, on a consideration of the cause, to discriminate the operations of devils, from those of Omnipotence.

To obviate this argument, we are told, that though we cannot determine from the miracles themselves, whether they be the works of God or of Satan, yet their real author may be discovered, by an examination of the doctrine, in behalf of which they are performed. But to omit other things which might be mentioned; we observe, that a revelation may contain doctrines above reason, doctrines seemingly repugnant to reason, doctrines, therefore, from the nature of which we can derive no assistance, in judging of the miracles wrought in attestation of them. Hence it is plain, that unless miracles be a sufficient proof, such a revelation could not be proved. It follows, that were the notion which we are now combating just, men could not certainly distinguish, in some cases easily imagined, between a real and a pretended revelation; and consequently, though a genuine revelation were presented to them, they would be under no obligation to receive it.

The only infallible criterion of a true revelation, it is said, is the nature of its doctrines. But than this criterion nothing can be conceived more vague and intermediate. It by no means follows, that a system hath been dictated by Divine wisdom, and ought to be considered as an authoritative declaration of the will of God, because the doctrines of which it is composed, are all agreeable to reason, and of a moral tendency. Notwithstanding its excellence and utility, it may be the mere offspring of the human mind. On the other hand, a revelation may comprehend, as we have already hinted, doctrines which seem to be contradictory to reason, and which, to persons under the influence of particular prejudices, shall appear unfavourable to the study and the practice of virtue. It may require closer attention, and a more dispassionate investigation than can be expected from mankind in general, to deceive the wisdom and salutary effects of some supernatural truths. The nature of its doctrines, therefore, would be a very uncertain standard by which to try a revelation. In some cases, a work of man might be mistaken for a work of the Spirit of God; and in others, an emanation from the fountain of all intelligence and purity, might be disregarded as an effusion of folly and licentiousness. It is easy to conceive many instances, in which the subject would be involved in inextricable confusion and perplexity.

I have been the longer in refuting this hypothesis, because it is espoused, as I have already observed, not only by infidels, but by some Christians, who affect great accuracy in their ideas, but, in this instance, have in my opinion fallen into a dangerous error. For their sakes, I shall subjoin a single remark, that to assert, that miracles alone are incapable of proving the truth of a doctrine, destroys the argument from them, so often brought forward in the Scriptures, and represents the reasonings of our Lord himself as inconclusive: "Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake." "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."*

* John xiv. 11. v. 36. x. 25. xv. 24. Vid. Alphons. Turret. de Verit. Relig. Jud. et Christ. p. 341—351.

IV. The supposed contradictions in the Scriptures furnish another argument against their inspiration. The Bible, it is affirmed, cannot be the Word of God, because many passages in it clash with each other, teaching contrary things, and giving such representations of the same acts in different places, as it is not possible to reconcile. This is a bold charge, and were it substantiated, would prove, not what infidels ultimately aim at establishing, that a revelation is not necessary, but that the Scriptures are not the revelation which we want. Truth is one and the same; and from the God of truth, therefore, a book which contradicts itself could not proceed.

In answer to this charge it might in general be observed, that no contradiction can be shown in the system of doctrine delivered in the Scriptures, in the precepts which they inculcate for the regulation of our conduct, or between the Old Testament and the New. The charge of contradiction relates solely to certain detached passages, and to some matters of inferior importance, by which the substance or essence of Divine revelation is not affected. But as it is undeniable, that the Scriptures could not be from God, if they contradicted themselves in the least things, any more than if they contradicted themselves in the greatest, it is necessary to descend to a more particular consideration of the subject.

It deserves attention, in the first place, that several passages of Scripture which appear, on a superficial view, to be contradictory, will be found to harmonize, when they are attentively examined, and their nature and design are understood. I shall give an example or two. When Solomon says, "Answer not a fool according to his folly," and immediately after, "answer a fool according to his folly;"* he seems with the same breath to deliver two opposite injunctions. But attention to the reason, which he subjoins to each of them, will convince us, that they form not inconsistent, but distinct rules of conduct, to be respectively observed according to the difference of circumstances. Again, we read, that, "the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man that he should repent:" and yet God is frequently said to have repented. Thus, in the same chapter, he is introduced saying to Samuel, "It repenteth me that I have set Saul up to be king†" The solution of this difficulty is easy. A change of counsel, which implies previous ignorance, or present weakness, or fickleness of temper, is nowhere attributed to God in the Scriptures. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" But he is represented as repenting, because a change sometimes takes place in his dispensations, similar to that which we observe in the conduct of men, when they have altered their designs. His repenting that he had made Saul king, is a declaration, in language accommodated to the ideas and feelings of men, of his intention to deprive him of a crown, which he had shown himself unworthy to wear.

With regard to other passages which it may appear more difficult to reconcile, the seeming contradiction will in most instances vanish, if we keep in view the following remarks: That in the Scriptures, as well as in other histories, the order of time is not always strictly observed; that the same persons and places have sometimes different names; that in the case of years and numbers of any kind, round numbers are used,

* Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.

† 1 Sam. xv. 11. 29.

or an even number is put for another, which was in a small degree deficient or redundant; that periods of time, as for example, the reigns of kings, have different dates, a king being reckoned to have commenced his reign, either at the death of his predecessors, or when he was associated with him in the government.* These remarks are applicable, in questions of history and chronology. There are several other general rules for solving the difficulties of Scripture, which may be seen in the writers on this subject. I shall quote some cases, in which one or two of the rules now laid down are successfully applied.

I have said, that the appearance of contradiction, sometimes arises from assigning to the same period different dates. I give the following example. In one place, Abraham is told, that "his seed should be a stranger in a land that was not theirs, and should serve them, and that they should afflict them four hundred years."† But in another place, we read, that the sojourning of the children of Israel who dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. "And it came to pass, at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self same day, it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."‡ The computation is made from two different æras. In the first passage, the time is reckoned from the promise made to Abraham of a son, or from the birth of Isaac; in the second it is counted from his departure, in obedience to the Divine command, from the land of his nativity. I shall add another example, which respects the commencement of a reign. We are informed that "in the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years." But in the tenth verse of the same chapter, we are told, that "in the thirty-seventh year of the same Joash, began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria."§ Now, if to the three and twenty years of Joash, mentioned in the first passage, we add the seventeen years of Jehoahaz, we come down to the thirty-ninth or fortieth year of Joash, when on the death of Jehoahaz, the reign of Jehoash may be supposed to have begun. Yet it is easy to assign the reason why the commencement of his reign is fixed two or three years earlier, in the thirty-seventh year of Joash, when his father must have been alive, by supposing that his father admitted him as his associate in the government, two or three years before his death. This solution is the more probable, as we find, from the case of Jehoshaphat and his son, that in those days such a practice was not uncommon.||

Another rule, to which we should attend, in order to remove the apparent contradictions of Scripture, is, that the order of time is not always observed. According to John, Christ was annointed at Bethany, six days before the passover.¶ Yet Matthew takes no notice of that remarkable circumstance, till within two days of the feast.** The reason is manifest. It was at this time that Judas offered to the chief priests and elders to betray him; and the evangelist, intending to relate his treachery, returns to the event which prompted him to it. The rebuke which he received from Christ in the house of Simon, when he

* Vid. Alphons. Turret. de. Ver t. Relig. Jud. et Christ, p. 296—7.

† Gen. xv. 13.

‡ Exod. xii. 40, 41.

§ 2 Kings xiii. 1. 10.

|| 2 Kings viii. 16.

¶ John xii. 1.

** Mat. xxvi. 2. 6.

complained of the waste of ointment, had irritated his proud, disaffected heart, and inspired him with sentiments of revenge.

The mention of the unction of our Saviour, which was preparatory to his burial, naturally introduces another observation, which will be of use in removing difficulties, namely that two facts may much resemble each other, and yet not be the same. Though, therefore, while they agree in many circumstances, they should differ in others, it is through haste and inattention, that we charge the Scriptures on this account with contradiction. The anointing of Christ six days before the passover, is evidently different from the anointing recorded in the seventh chapter of Luke. The two incidents agree, as both happened at table, and in the house of a person named Simon; but on considering the passages, they appear to have taken place at different times.

I may add, that no person of judgment and candor will suspect a contradiction, because the same story is related by one sacred writer, with a variety of circumstances, which are not noticed by another. Two witnesses do not contradict each other, though the evidence of the one be more minute and particular than that of the other, if they concur in the substance of their testimony. The omission of a circumstance, in the narrative of one evangelist, which is mentioned by another, does not imply that the circumstance did not take place, but may be accounted for in various ways. Perhaps we may admit, that as inspiration does not infer omniscience, Luke for example, did not know every particular, which was known by Matthew or Mark. Thus Mark relates, that Jesus rebuked the wind, on the evening of the same day, on which he had delivered the parable of the sower.* Of this circumstance Luke seems to have been ignorant; and knowing only that the two events had happened at no great distance from each other, in recording the second, he expresses himself in general terms with respect to the time: "Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples."† If any person should be surprised at the insinuation, that inspired men might not be acquainted with all the particulars relative to the subjects of which they wrote, let him remember, that John, in his Gospel, speaks with uncertainty of the distance, to which the disciples had rowed, when Jesus came to them walking on the sea; and that Paul seems not to have been sure of the number of persons who had been baptized by him in Corinth.‡ Other instances of the same nature may be found in the Scriptures.§

I shall take notice only of one other apparent contradiction, namely, the different genealogies of Christ by Matthew and Luke. Difficult as it may seem to reconcile them, the usual mode is at once simple and liable to no solid objection. Matthew gives his legal genealogy, tracing his descent from David, by Joseph, who was his reputed father, and by his connection with whom, he was accounted in law a member of the ancient royal family. But as it was necessary, that he should be naturally, and not merely in a legal sense, a descendant, of the son of Jesse, Luke sets down his true genealogy, and proves that he was his lineal offspring, by producing a list of the progenitors of Mary his

* Mark iv. 35.

† Luke viii. 22.

‡ John vi. 19. 1 Cor. i. 16.

§ Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament, translated by Marsh, vol. iii. chap. 2.

mother. That this method of reconciling the two evangelists is just, may be inferred from this consideration, that in Matthew his genealogy is carried up to David by Solomon, and in Luke by Nathan, another son of that illustrious prince; whence it is plain, that as both historians profess to show the lineage of the same person, they trace it by different parents. It is not to charge them merely with not being inspired, but with a want of common sense, to suppose that they both seriously intended to give his genealogy by Joseph.

It must be acknowledged, indeed, that in an instance or two, we meet with contradictions in the Scriptures, which cannot be reconciled without an alteration of the text. For example, we read that Ahaziah was sixty and two years old when he began to reign. But his father died at the age of sixty, and consequently, according to this statement, was two years younger than his son. This is absurd. On turning, however, to another book, we find that Ahaziah was only twenty-two years old when he ascended the throne, and might therefore, in respect of age, be the son of Jehoram.* In one place, Jehoiachim is said to have been eighteen years old, when he began to reign, and in another, to have been only eight years old.† In such cases we are ready to allow, that through the carelessness or inadvertence of transcribers, an error hath crept into the text. One number hath been substituted for another. This concession is not so derogatory to the honor of the Scriptures, as the inconsiderate zeal, which retaining manifest corruptions, attempts to vindicate them by arguments, which can only provoke the smile of an infidel. Can any thing be more foolish than to endeavor to reconcile the two passages concerning Ahaziah, by saying, that one of them gives an account of his age, and the other, an account of the whole period of the authority of the family of Omri, from which he was descended?—Another historian, then, might assert without correction or explanation, that a certain king was three hundred years old when he began to reign, because three hundred years had elapsed, since his family mounted the throne. No person I am sure, would admire the accuracy, or the judgment of such a historian; and we ought to beware of representing, in order to serve a particular purpose, an inspired writer as uttering things, which would be pronounced nonsense from the pen of any other man.—While we admire the care of Divine Providence in the preservation of the Scriptures, we do not affirm that all the transcribers of them were miraculously guarded against error. Various motives, among which a veneration for the sacred books may be considered as having exerted the chief influence, contributed to render them scrupulously careful; but that they were under no infallible guidance, is evident from the different readings, which are discovered by a collation of manuscripts, and the mistakes in matters of greater or less importance, observable in them all.

A contradiction which could not be imputed to the blunder of a transcriber, but was fairly chargeable on the sacred writers themselves, would completely disprove their inspiration. But the appearance of contradiction is no valid objection to the Divine authority of the Scriptures, even on this ground, that if a revelation were granted to mankind,

* 2 Cron. xxii. 2. xxi. 20. 2 Kings viii. 26.

† 2 Kings xxiv. 8. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9.

it might be expected, that the harmony of all its parts would be manifest at the first glance, and that no unnecessary obstacle would be laid in the way of our receiving it. In the works of creation, and the dispensations of Providence, which we know to be Divine, we meet with several things apparently inconsistent with that wisdom, and goodness, and justice, of which we see in other things the most glorious displays. Yet not only are we sure in general that the seeming inconsistencies may be harmonized; but in most cases we are able to give a satisfactory account of them. If in a few instances we feel ourselves at a loss to explain them, we oppose to them the clear decisive evidences of the Divine perfections, with which we are surrounded, and hope for the day, when our ignorance and doubts shall give place to knowledge and certainty. Since, then, there are apparent contradictions in the book of nature, let it not surprise us, that they likewise occur in the book of revelation.— If, notwithstanding apparent contradictions, the first book be confessedly from God, we cannot reasonably, on the same ground, call in question the Divinity of the second. Though some of the difficulties which present themselves in it may baffle our endeavors to unravel them, yet the harmony, which runs through all its other parts, and the marks of its heavenly origin, which are manifest, almost in every page, justify us in recognizing its authority, and submitting to be implicitly guided by its dictates.

V. It is objected, that the Scriptures contain doctrines mysterious, and contrary to reason. Every thing in a revelation should be perfectly intelligible; and since reason is the gift of God, doctrines which contradict it cannot proceed from him, but must owe their existence to the folly, or the knavery of men. Mystery is one of the arts employed by imposture to overawe and astonish the mind; and dogmas, which offer violence to the understanding, have evidently been suggested by superstition or enthusiasm. The objection consists of two parts, which we shall separately consider.

That there are mysteries in the Scriptures we do not deny; and we detest the baseness of those, who explain them away, or openly reject them, with a view, as they allege, to simplify Christianity, and recommend it to infidels. In the prosecution of their treacherous design, they strip it of all its peculiarities, and exhibit in its stead, a cold and comfortless system of natural religion, dignified, for the sake of form, with the name of our Saviour. But the mysteries of the Gospel are the pretext only, not the real cause, why infidels state themselves in opposition to it; for in the religion of nature, which they profess to admire, there are difficulties as many, and as great, as those of revelation. What do these disputers think of a Being, who had no beginning, and who is no older now than he was at the creation, because in his existence there is no succession? What do they think of a Being, who is present in all places, and yet is not extended; and who, though he be at the same time in heaven and on earth, is not partly in heaven, and partly on earth, but is wholly every where? What do they think of his certain foreknowledge of the actions of men, while the actions continue free, and the agents are accountable? What do they think of the existence of moral evil, among the works of him, who being holy, necessarily abhors it, and being Omnipotent could have prevented it? These mys-

* Bishop Watson's Apology for the Bible, Letter X.

teries are as incomprehensible as those of the Trinity, and the Incarnation; and they are mysteries not of revelation, but of reason.

Every thing is full of mysteries. We cannot tell how our bodies were formed, and are nourished; we cannot tell what our souls are, and how they are united to our bodies; we cannot comprehend the structure of a worm, of a hair of our heads, of the meanest weed, or of a grain of sand. What right, then, has any man to demand, that though nature abound in mysteries, in revelation there should be none? Shall this be the only work of God, in which there is nothing to astonish our reason, and humble our pride of understanding? Truly, since all his works are wonderful, it is natural to expect that revelation, the last and best, should not in this respect be inferior to any of them. As the design of it is to inform us of the nature, the counsels, and the dispensations of God, it must contain many things too high for us to understand; and when I consider that all his other works are incomprehensible, had revelation been perfectly level to my capacity, I should have concluded that it was not his, because it wanted his usual signature. As the case now stands, there is a striking analogy between nature and revelation. But if every thing in the latter had been plain and perspicuous, they would have been totally unlike; and it is highly probable, that infidels themselves would have been the first to exclaim against it, as too simple to have proceeded from infinite wisdom; as comprehending nothing but what the human mind, without supernatural assistance, might have discovered or contrived.

Perhaps we shall be told with a sneer, that it is absurd to speak of a revealed mystery, because as soon as a mystery is revealed, it ceases to be one. This mighty objection has always appeared to me to be perfectly contemptible, and to be nothing more than a play upon a word. To reveal a thing may signify to give a complete discovery, a full explanation of it. In this sense, what is revealed ceases to be mysterious, as a place ceases to be dark, as soon as it is filled with the rays of the sun. Infidels, and their friends and allies, Socinians, run away with this meaning of the term, and then boast of a victory; whereas nothing more is necessary to put a stop to their triumph, or to make it appear ridiculous in the eyes of all impartial persons, than simply to observe, that to reveal a thing may also signify to make known, that such a thing exists, without subjoining an illustration of its nature, and a solution of its difficulties; and that this is the only sense, in which the mysteries of the Christian religion were ever said to be revealed. A fact may be published, while the causes of it, the circumstances which led to it, and several things relative to its nature, remain unknown. Thus I know that vegetables grow, that food nourishes the human body, and that heavy bodies descend; but though I may speak of these subjects in the language of science, I understand little more than the facts. There are revealed mysteries, if I may be allowed the expression, in the book of nature, as well as in the Scriptures.

But of what use, it will be asked, are incomprehensible doctrines? I answer, that if they were, in every sense incomprehensible; if we could form no conceptions respecting them, directly or indirectly, and could draw no inferences from them, they would be perfectly useless; and a question would arise whether a book, of which some of the contents were so nugatory, could be ascribed to God as its author. But there

re various important purposes, which mysterious doctrines serve. They humble our reason, the boasted powers of which are overwhelmed in the attempt to comprehend them; they accustom us to implicit submission to the dictates of infinite wisdom; they inspire us with reverence for that Being, whose essence and counsels are inscrutable; they create in us a desire for a better state, where, if the limited nature of our faculties forbid us to hope for knowledge absolutely perfect, we expect to enjoy many discoveries, which in the present state, we are not able to bear. But this is not their only use. Though they will continue inexplicable, after our utmost endeavors to understand them, yet knowing that there are such doctrines, and possessing some general ideas on the subject, we may derive from them aid to our faith, and motives to quicken our devotion and obedience. Without the knowledge of the fact, that there are three persons in the Godhead, not one just notion of the scheme of redemption could be formed; but all that is necessary to be known of that scheme, may be understood, though we have no conception of the mode, in which three persons subsist in one numerical essence. The knowledge that the Son of God assumed our nature, and laid down his life for us, may create in our minds confidence in him, and convince us of the obligation which we are under to love and serve him, though we be totally ignorant how his two natures are united in one person. It is inattention which leads some persons to imagine, that an incomprehensible doctrine must be useless. The cause of gravitation is unknown; but being assured of the fact by daily experience, we apply this law of nature, according to which heavy bodies descend, to many important purposes in life.

I proceed to consider the second part of the objection, in which it is asserted, that there are in the Scriptures, doctrines contrary to reason; or to speak more accurately, the same doctrines, which we acknowledge to be mysterious, are charged with being irrational. In the present case, reason must signify either the universal reason of mankind, or the reason of some individuals; reason in a corrupted, or in a perfect state. But to the universal reason of mankind, the doctrines to which the objection refers, are certainly not contrary, since thousands, among whom we can number not a few of the most vigorous and cultivated minds, have assented to them without hesitation. If some individuals cannot reconcile them to their reason, we have yet to learn, that their ideas are the standard of truth. The reason of a Christian or a Trinitarian has as good a title to decide this dispute, as the reason of an infidel or a socinian. It is not yet proved, to the satisfaction of all parties, that faith and orthodoxy imply imbecility of mind, and that genius and learning are the inseparable attendants of unbelief and heresy. Reason, when corrupted, that is, when blinded and perverted by prejudices and erroneous conceptions, may pronounce that to be absurd, which is perfectly rational; but its decrees do not alter the nature of things, and will have no influence on the judgment of wise men. Now it is certain, that the reason of those, who call the mysterious doctrines of the Scriptures irrational, is depraved and weakened, because the reason of all men, as experience attests, is more or less warped by passion, and interest, and false notions, and hath evidently lost that vigor and capacity, with which it was originally endowed. We do not, therefore, consider the inconsistency of these doctrines with reason, in its degenerate state, as a proof that they are repugnant to reason, in its native purity and strength.

Notwithstanding the illiberal abuse, with which some doctrines of the Scriptures have been treated, they have not yet been demonstrated to be contradictory to reason. Attempts to prove them irrational, are founded in a misconception, or an intentional misrepresentation of their nature ; so that it is only necessary for their vindication, to give a fair and impartial statement of them. Were it said, that God is three and one in the same sense, we might, without scruple affirm, that a proposition affirming a more palpable contradiction, could not be conceived. But though the enemies of the doctrine of the Trinity charge it with this absurdity, it appears to be entirely free from it, when exhibited without distortion or disguise. As laid down in the Scriptures, and taught by Christian writers, it is this, that in one undivided essence, three Divine persons subsist ; or that there are three persons possessing the same essence, and equal in glory, power, and every perfection. From this view of the doctrine, it is evident, that it neither multiplies unity, nor reduces a plurality into one ; or in other words, that it does not confound the ideas of one and three, predicating them of the same thing, in the same sense ; but preserving the ideas perfectly distinct, it attributes them to God in different senses, asserting the Godhead to be one in essence, but three in personal distinctions. It cannot be denied, that in an infinite essence, there may be distinctions, to which there is nothing similar in ours, and of which we are unable to form any conception. Should any man say, that such distinctions are impossible, he would pretend to know what can, and what cannot consist, with infinitude of nature and perfection.

VI. It is asserted that the Scriptures cannot be inspired, because many things in them are unworthy of God. Of this nature are those descriptions which represent him as clothed with the members and actuated by the passions of man ; certain precepts which seem to be immoral and inhuman, as the command to Abraham to offer up Isaac, to the Israelites to borrow from the Egyptians, and to the same people to destroy the nations of Canaan ; many of the laws of Moses, and in particular, those which are usually termed ceremonial ; and a variety of passages, which are said to be trifling, obscene, and cruel, and to imply an approbation of base and criminal actions.

I might content myself with referring to the authors who have treated of this subject, for an answer to all these particulars, a full consideration of which would lead to a discussion far exceeding our limits. A few hints, however, may be given with a design to show, in what manner these apparent difficulties may be removed.

When human members, and human passions, are attributed to God, the description is evidently figurative, and is intended, through the medium of sensible ideas, with which we are familiarly acquainted, to assist us in conceiving his infinite perfections. If such descriptions be supposed to be liable to abuse ; if they seem calculated to beget and cherish gross conceptions of the Deity, as a corporeal and imperfect being ; it should be considered that the danger is obviated in other places of the Scriptures, where, dropping the language of metaphor, the inspired writers give the most sublime views of his infinite greatness and glory. It will be acknowledged by every person acquainted with the history of human opinions, that the Bible was the first book, which taught the pure spirituality of the essence, and communicated just ideas of the immensity and immutability, of God.

The command to Abraham to offer up his son, will not appear objectionable to any person who reflects, that the power of life and death belongs to the Supreme Governor of the Universe, who may delegate it for sufficient reasons to another, or employ another as his minister to exercise it. The design of the command was important, namely, to try the faith of the patriarch, and to exhibit an example of cheerful, unreserved obedience to all succeeding generations.

With regard to the command given to the Israelites to borrow from the Egyptians, I observe, that according to the best critics, the word rendered *to borrow* may be translated simply *to ask*, and thus the difficulty vanishes. The sovereign Lord of all had transferred a right to the property of the Egyptians to the Israelites, whom the former had long defrauded and oppressed. That they might be put in actual possession of it, he directed them to make a simple demand from their neighbors, without subjoining any promise, or giving any expectation, that it would be returned. If it should seem improbable that an unconditional request would be granted, especially as it was the request of slaves, to their unfeeling and imperious lords, we have only to recollect, that the miracles wrought by Moses were beginning to procure respect to the Israelites, and that according to the sacred story, "God gave his people favor in the sight of the Egyptians."

The command to the Israelites to destroy the seven nations of Canaan is explained nearly in the same manner as the command to offer Isaac in sacrifice. When a nation hath forfeited by its crimes a claim to life, he who might swallow up the guilty by an earthquake, or consume them by famine and pestilence, may commission another nation to be the instrument of his vengeance. If the command seem difficult, because the Israelites could not obey it without feeling personal enmity, or being animated by a cruel and vindictive spirit towards the devoted victims, it should be considered, that it was equally possible for them to act in this instance without improper motives, as for a magistrate, from a love of justice, and zeal for the public good, to order the execution of a criminal, whom he pities as a man. On the supposition that the Israelites were inflamed by private resentment, or a thirst for blood, the blame was entirely imputable to themselves. The Divine command was not the cause of their malice and barbarity, but merely the occasion of their displaying the bad dispositions, which previously lurked in their breasts.

The ceremonial law has been a copious source of objections. Were it agreeable to my present design, I might to every minute cavil return a particular answer; but I shall only present to the reader the following general observations.

No candid person will refuse, that for several laws which now appear strange, there might be weighty reasons, of which we, who are removed from the age of Moses by so long an interval, may be totally ignorant. Such laws no man has a right to pronounce unworthy of God. Unacquainted with the circumstances of the case, he cannot decide upon it without precipitation and imprudence. The wisest actions not seldom seem foolish to those who know not their causes and ends. It is easy to account for other laws, which careless and uninformed readers may look upon as trifling, by observing that they were enacted in opposition to the superstitious usages of the neighboring nations, and were intended

to be means of preserving the Israelites from idolatry. We may think it beneath the majesty of God to forbid the Israelites to round the corners of their beards, and to wear a garment of linen and woolen, while we are ignorant of the reasons on which such precepts were founded; but as soon as we learn that both practices prevailed among the heathens, and were connected with their idolatrous worship, we perceive the propriety of the interference of the Supreme Lawgiver in matters apparently so insignificant.* With respect to other laws, for which we may be able to give no better account, it would be sufficient to say, that of how little soever importance they might be in themselves, they served a valuable purpose by forming the Israelites to the habit of obedience, and thus ensuring the observance of the moral precepts. They taught them to revere the will of God in every instance, and to make it the sole rule and reason of their conduct. I may add concerning the ceremonial law in general, that though we may not perceive in it, when viewed by itself, all those marks of wisdom which we previously expected; yet in connexion with the christian dispensation to which it was introductory, and considered as "a shadow of good things to come," it appears to have been an institution admirably contrived for the instruction of the Israelites in that scheme of religion, the establishment of which was the ultimate design of their separation from the other nations of the world. It is chiefly in this connexion that we assert the ceremonial law to have been worthy of God. When infidels overlook or deny this connexion, this reference to another and a better dispensation, it may be easy for them to select precepts, in appearance puerile and frivolous; but might not the wisest ordinances and laws, by similar misrepresentations, be exhibited in a ridiculous light? It is manifest injustice to judge of the ceremonial law according to our own arbitrary ideas of it, and not according to its own declared end and intention.

To the general charge, that some passages of Scripture are mean, some are impure, some breathe a spirit of inhumanity, some imply an approbation of base and criminal actions, I may return a general answer. Things may seem mean and trifling to us, which men in past ages were interested in knowing. What is mean in itself, may become relatively important, by being subservient to some moral end, or introductory to some great transaction. Our ideas of meanness may be the effect of a false delicacy, the consequence of our having fixed our attention and admiration on scenes of pomp and magnificence. The life of the patriarchs will be mean in the eyes of the man, who, accustomed to the ceremonial of a court or the artificial manners of civilized society, hath lost all relish for nature and simplicity. When impure actions are recorded, they are set down, not as examples to be imitated, but as facts, which, on account of their connexion with other facts, or of their consequences, could not be omitted; and they are related in such a manner, as has no tendency to corrupt the imagination and inflame the passions. If modern refinement would throw a veil over some scenes exhibited in the Scriptures, it is a veil through which the objects might be seen, and would make a more dangerous impression than is now made, when they are displayed without disguise. Let any impartial

* Stillingfleet's *Origines Sacre*, Book ii. c. 7.

person consult his own feelings, and he will acknowledge this peculiarity, as resulting from the chaste, and artless manner of relation used in the Scriptures, that the same actions, which in the page of a novelist, and sometimes even of a historian or philosopher, would have awaked a train of sensual ideas, in the narrative of the sacred writers do not excite the slightest irregular emotion. Nothing but downright stupidity can lead any man to imagine, either that every thing mentioned in the Scriptures is approved, if it be not expressly condemned; or that all the incidents should be dignified and sublime. A considerable portion of Scripture history is the history of common men, and common events; and differs from ordinary history only in this respect, that it was recorded by the express appointment and direction of Heaven. It is a fair representation of things as they happened; and we ought not to be surprised, therefore, that we meet with frequent displays of lust, avarice, ambition, and cruelty. These are recorded to vindicate the Divine conduct in the punishment of individuals and societies, and to administer an useful lesson to us on the depravity of human nature, and the odiousness and folly of vice. The passages in which they occur, could not justly be considered as unworthy of God, unless he were represented as giving his sanction to the immoralities related in them; or unless it were proved to be inconsistent with some of his perfections, to order the history of mankind in one age to be written for the moral improvement of following generations, and for the glory of his justice, goodness, wisdom, and patience, manifested in the dispensations of his providence.

VII. The last objection respects the style of the Scriptures. It is not so dignified, so elegant, so conformable to rule, as we might expect the style of a divine writing to be. We do not perceive in it the accuracy, the politeness, the energy, which characterize some human compositions; and how then can the Scriptures, which in these respects are so much inferior to the works of man, be a revelation from God? Who can believe that they were dictated by the Divine Spirit, or composed by his direction and assistance?

It is not necessary that I should spend much time in answering this objection. Few are able to judge of the style of the Scriptures in the original languages, especially in the Hebrew, which hath long since ceased to be spoken; and those who judge of it merely by translations, as many infidels do, are too unlearned, and on this question too ignorant, to be entitled to any regard. Yet even in translations, the Scriptures are so far from appearing devoid of eloquence, that innumerable passages may be pointed out, which excel in beauty and sublimity every thing of the same kind, in the writings of the profane authors. On this subject, every person who has ability and leisure may decide for himself. Were it proper to appeal to authorities, we could produce, in favor of the style and composition of the Scriptures, the opinions of accomplished scholars, with whom few infidels, if any, deserve to be compared.*

* The reader will be pleased to see the judgment of that great man, and profound scholar, the late Sir William Jones. The following words were written on the last leaf of his Bible. "I have regularly and attentively read these holy scriptures, and am of opinion, that this volume, independently of its Divine origin, contains more sublimity and beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and finer strains of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been composed."

It may be true, that the Scriptures are not written according to the rules of art; but it would betray the most deplorable folly to account this circumstance an argument against their Divinity. Must God, when he speaks, carefully observe the laws of rhetoric laid down in the schools? Does he perceive any excellence in the artificial arrangements, and musical cadence of words? Are visible marks of human art necessary to prove, that a book was written by the inspiration of God? Perhaps some objector against theism will tell us, that the world is not an effect of intelligence and design, because the landscapes of nature are not conformable to the present fashionable style of laying out pleasure-grounds; the mountains are not regular figures; and the rocks are not disposed according to the orders of architecture. This objection would be as good in favor of atheism, as that which we are at present considering is, in favor of infidelity. Besides, the rules of rhetoric, of which pedants are perpetually talking, were drawn from models exhibited in the writings of authors, who lived in these western parts of the world. They seem to us to have a foundation in nature. But let us travel into the eastern countries, where the sacred books were written, and we shall find prevailing there, ideas of composition, totally different from ours. A similar diversity of taste will be observed in the distant regions of the west, the north, and the south. As it was impossible that the style of the Scriptures should accord with so many different standards, and as there was no good reason, why it should be accommodated to the notions of a Greek or Roman critic, rather than of an Indian or a Chinese rhetorician, the mode of writing, which was common in the land of Judea, was adopted. He who does not consider the sacred books as the composition of Jews, and as in the first instance addressed, for the most part, to their own countrymen, is alike regardless of the laws of sound criticism, and the dictates of common sense. Had the Scriptures resembled in their composition a Greek or Roman classic, we should long since have heard from infidels, that the proof of forgery was incontrovertible.

Some of the ancients were of opinion, that if the gods should descend to the earth to converse with mortals, they would speak in the language of Plato. I differ widely from those admirers of the style of that philosopher. A style which admitted words and phrases not of vulgar use, and to the vulgar therefore unintelligible, which was too elevated, or too refined to be apprehended by uncultivated minds, would counteract the professed intention of a Divine revelation. The Scriptures were not designed exclusively for philosophers and scholars, for persons of discernment and taste, but likewise for the poor and illiterate; and they are written therefore in a style, which learned and unlearned can understand. If the former be displeased, that truth appears in so plain a dress, the latter have cause to rejoice, that no paint hides her native beauty from their eye, no meretricious ornament conceals her shape or her features.

It is a proof of the Divinity of the Scriptures, that they are not decorated with the tinsel of human eloquence. In respect of style, they are just such, as, laying all prejudice aside, we would expect them to be. It would be unworthy of God to speak after the manner of an orator. He speaks like himself, with majestic simplicity; he employs no arts to impose on our imaginations, and steal upon our hearts, because naked word is able to effect its purpose, without any adventitious aid.

I have now given a view of the chief objections against the inspiration of the Scriptures. To these as to general heads all the other objections of infidels may be referred. The answers which have been returned to them will, I hope, be deemed satisfactory. Before concluding this chapter, it is proper to observe, that when we are at a loss for a particular answer to any objection, which may occur in reading or in conversation, we have a general answer ready in the evidences detailed in the foregoing part of this essay. An objection cannot disprove a fact, or a truth clearly established. If it follow from the arguments formerly advanced, that the Scriptures are inspired, we may safely and confidently rest in the conclusion, though there should be some circumstances, for which we cannot account; some remaining difficulties, which we are unable to solve. It is certainly absurd and uncandid to go on disputing against luminous and decisive evidence. There is a point, at which opposition ought to cease, and assent should be no longer withheld. Yet infidels, though the divinity of our religion, and of the books containing it, have been often proved by arguments, to which no solid answer was ever returned, continue to argue against revelation, as if nothing had been said in its defence, and are surprised when their cavils do not prevail upon others to renounce it. But as it discovers soundness of judgment not to admit a proposition, till sufficient evidence in support of it be laid before us; so to reject a proposition, which hath been fully proved, indicates no uncommon prudence and penetration, but a disease or defect in the understanding, rendering it incapable of perceiving proof and feeling its force; or the influence of some corrupt affection, prompting men to reason against their convictions. In the mean time, neither the impertinent cavils of unbelievers, nor those real difficulties, which they are too quick sighted not to observe and to object to us, should overthrow our faith, or create any hesitation and perplexity in our minds. We should convert them into excitements to greater diligence in the investigations of the truth, and more earnest prayer for the illumination of the Spirit.—Thus, we shall acquire clearer views, and a firmer persuasion of the divine authority of the Scriptures; and the very means, which are industriously employed to draw us away from the faith, shall ultimately contribute to our establishment.

CHAPTER VIII.

Conclusion.

IF the Scriptures be a revelation from God, and satisfactory evidence of their inspiration have been produced, it is incumbent upon all those, to whom they are presented, to receive them as Divine, and to submit to their authority. The case is not the same, as when we are called upon to embrace a system of philosophical or political opinions. We may be under no obligation either from duty or from interest, to decide for such a system or against it; it may be a matter of no con-

sequence whether we assent to it, or deny it. But not to receive the Scriptures, which are the words of eternal life, and have been announced by God himself to the world, as a revelation of his will, is at once to treat his authority with contempt, and to do the highest possible injury to ourselves.

Infidels may plead, that the evidence of their divinity is not so clear and convincing, as to be the foundation of a rational assent. Its sufficiency or insufficiency cannot be determined by their asseverations, or by ours, but must be ascertained by an attentive consideration of its nature. It is certain that far less evidence is accounted sufficient in many important affairs, and that an unbeliever will risk his fortune, and even his life, in an undertaking, for the success of which there is not half the evidence, which we have for the inspiration of the scriptures. Why is he so easily satisfied in the one case, but so delicate and scrupulous in the other? If he say, that when a greater interest is at stake, greater caution should be exercised, we grant the observation to be just; but we maintain, that the strength of the evidence in favor of revelation, bears an exact proportion to the superior importance of the case; and we refuse to accept of the apology as sincere, because no other part of his conduct accords with this affected concern for the welfare of his soul. Did he discover a desire to know the truth, a solicitude to please God, a trembling anxiety with respect to futurity, a fear of every mistake, and every action which might prove fatal to his happiness, we might attribute his objections to the evidences of the Gospel, to a dread lest he should rashly take a step, which he would afterwards have cause to repent. But he who laughs at all religion, minds nothing but the present world, spends his days in the chase of pleasures or of honors, and bestows his whole attention and care on his body, insults our understandings when he tells us, that it is from an apprehension of the consequences in another state of existence, that he does not embrace christianity.

It is in vain that the adversaries of the Scriptures allege in their defence, that even on the supposition of their Divine authority, they are excusable in not receiving them, because they cannot perceive the force of the evidence in their favor. We are told, that our understandings are not in our own power, and that if our minds happen to be so constituted, as to be incapable of discerning truths which are manifest to others, their dulness or incapacity may be called our misfortune, but ought not to be imputed to us as a crime. But the declamations of infidels, and of some others, on this favorite topic, are loose and inaccurate. We shall not dispute that the mind is passive in the reception of many of its ideas. There are certain propositions which shine with their own light, and convince all, whether willing or unwilling, of their truth. But there are truths, on the other hand, the perception of which requires attention, freedom from prejudice, a disposition to learn, humility, and the absence of vicious propensities. If these qualities be wanting, the truth may not be perceived, but in such a case the person is undoubtedly culpable. The evidences of the Divinity of the Scriptures are very strong; but it is possible for one to take a hasty or partial view of them, to listen only to the arguments on the opposite side, to come to the consideration of them, with a mind prepossessed by unfair and insidious representations of the subject, and to wish that one may find them not

unsatisfactory. That a person, thus predisposed, was not satisfied, could excite no surprise. It would be manifestly his own fault, that he was not convinced; and his unbelief would most certainly be criminal. We hear much of the candor of infidels, not only from themselves, but also from some who bear the name of Christians, but in the excess of their harp, injure the cause, which they profess to defend. But setting aside the proofs, which might be brought from the writings and conversation of infidels, that candor is a virtue to which they have no claim, at least in opposing revelation, I beg the reader to consider, that the Scriptures, to which we are now at liberty to appeal as an authority, assure us, that no man can be candid in rejecting the truth. They trace unbelief, not only to the darkness of the understanding, but to the corrupt passions of the heart. It is the offspring of pride, of vanity, of covetousness, of sensuality. At the same time, they declare, that every honest and upright man, every man whose mind is purified from prejudice and lust, if he be not already satisfied, shall finally be convinced, that the doctrines of the Christian religion are Divine. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."* Infidelity is the effect not of physical, but of moral causes; it is not a misfortune, but a crime; and a crime too, of an aggravated nature.

How much happiness do infidels lose by rejecting the Gospel? I know, indeed, that they are of the contrary opinion, and that the Scriptures are represented by them, as imposing a variety of severe and unreasonable restraints. But the ideas, which they have formed of the unpleasant and gloomy nature of a religious life, have no foundation but in the arbitrary associations of fancy. Modes of life, which appear very insipid, and even disagreeable, have sometimes hidden sources of satisfaction, which cause them to be highly relished by those, who are actually engaged in them. It is analogous, therefore, to our experience relative to other things, that a virtuous life should have charms, which more than compensate for all the sacrifices which it demands. It is worthy of remark, that none complain of the restraints imposed by revelation, but those who have not submitted to them? we hear not a single murmur from those who have. Is not this a proof, that the severity of religious discipline is wholly imaginary; and that such a notion originates in a licentious, dissipated turn of mind, which must disqualify any person who is under its influence, for judging impartially of the evidences of the Scriptures.

Does the infidel boast of his pleasures? The believer does not boast of his; but he is cheered and made happy by them, in the intervals of solitude, when the former experiences a dreadful vacuity, or his joys are succeeded by the stings of remorse; in the season of affliction, and the hour of death, when his past crimes, rising like so many ghosts from the grave of oblivion, encompass him with terrors, and an opening eternity presents to his view the unutterable horrors of despair. What are the hopes of infidelity, even in a time of health and prosperity? It has none, except this poor, grovelling, fluctuating hope, that life shall be protracted a little longer, and that to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. Whether there be a state beyond the grave, it

* John vii. 17.

is unable certainly to tell; it is afraid to inquire from a misgiving of mind, which it strives in vain to overcome; or, if it ape the language of religion, and speak of that state with confidence and expectation, it is in those moments, when its nerves are braced, its spirits are elevated, its blood flows with a full and regular tide, and the supposed distance of death allows the coward to put on the airs of a hero. The hope of the believer stoops to no sublunary object, but terminates on felicity too great to be conceived, and too sublime to be enjoyed, in this state of imperfection. He expects to triumph over death, to survive the present system of things, to prolong his pleasures through an endless duration. His eye brightens, as he approaches the last term of life; he welcomes the pang of dissolution. The infidel affects to pity the Christian, but in reality there are moments when he envies him. The Christian never envies the infidel, but at all times he thinks of him with the most tender pity.

The consequences of rejecting the Scriptures, on the supposition that they are Divinely inspired, are serious and alarming. In this case, the threatenings against the unbelieving and impenitent, will be found to be no vain terrors, no bugbears contrived by priests to keep the silly, unsuspecting multitude in awe. Infidels may make damnation their sport, but by all their art they shall not be able to avoid it. It is surely a crime worthy of the severest punishment, to reject, to misrepresent, to ridicule, to revile a revelation stamped with conspicuous characters of Divine wisdom and grace, and attested by wonders, which the arm of Omnipotence hath performed. If the Scriptures be a revelation from heaven, the light of nature is not sufficient. It is not sufficient for any man, whatever some may thoughtlessly and unguardedly assert; it is manifestly not sufficient for the infidel, who hath ungratefully, and contemptuously closed his eyes on a much clearer light. It cannot conduct any individual to happiness; it leaves its deluded votaries in misery. If the Scriptures be a revelation from God, there is only one method of gaining his favor and a blessed immortality; and that method infidels despise. They must, therefore, suffer the doom denounced in the Gospel. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him."*

These remarks are submitted to the consideration of such readers, as may unhappily have imbibed the principles of infidelity. Perhaps it is not so necessary to present to persons of this description evidences of the Divinity of the Scriptures, as to endeavor to awaken in their minds serious thoughts, with regard to their immortal interests. Infidelity, I will repeat it, is not the effect of a religious spirit, rendering men cautious, in general, what they admit as the rule of their conduct, and, in this instance, unreasonably scrupulous: it is the offspring of a perfect indifference to all religion, of a total want of concern about things invisible and future. The most cogent arguments cannot be expected to convince, while the mind is diverted by the cares and pleasures of life; but I should not despair of the conversion of the most determined enemy of revelation, if he were once brought in earnest to inquire how he might please God, and be forever happy. He would soon discover that no

* John iii. 36.

religion but the Gospel can furnish an effectual antidote to his fears, and solid foundation of his hopes.

To persons in the outset of life, the arguments of infidelity are addressed in circumstances peculiarly favorable to their success. Men, whose minds are sobered by time and reflection, are not so apt to be misled, unless some occasional cause lend its aid to warp their understandings. But there are two disadvantages of youth, to which the reasonings of unbelievers are indebted for the fatal influence often exerted on the mind at that period, immaturity of judgment, and the strength of passion. The young, indeed, are much disposed to overrate their own talents and acquirements, and to think themselves competent to the investigation of the most difficult questions; while the scanty measure of knowledge which the greater part of them possess, and the limited information which the most diligent can be supposed to have attained, disqualify them for encountering on equal terms the champions of irreligion, versed in all the arts of sophistry and deceit. They cannot comprehend all the bearings and relations of the subject in debate. The glare of eloquence dazzles their eyes, and the high tone of affirmation overawes and silences them. At the same time, the opinions which are urged upon them with all the confidence of truth, accord too well with the natural propensities of their hearts. Their warm temperament can ill brook the cold maxims of morality, the teasing restraints of religion. Entering upon a gay scene, where pleasure presents itself in many a tempting form, and woos them by every alluring art, can it be expected that they will sit down calmly to examine the arguments which are intended to prove, that they may yield to its solicitations with innocence and safety? By those who long for the fair fruit of the forbidden tree, the authority which repeals the prohibition to taste it, will not be scrupulously discussed.

Let me beseech my readers of this class to pause a little and reflect, before they make a surrender of their faith. It is possible, that the arguments against revelation are not so strong as to you they may appear; it is certain, that men of faculties more matured, of larger experience and more extensive inquiry, do look upon them as inconclusive; and it may be presumed that a closer and more dispassionate consideration of them would convince *you* of their weakness and futility. Ought you not to proceed with caution, to examine with the greatest care the merits of the question, to have the evidence fully and fairly presented before you venture to give sentence against a religion, said to have been attested by the most astonishing miracles, embraced by the wise and good in all ages since its publication, and by yourselves held sacred from your childhood? Would you not do well to inquire what is offered you in the room of that religion; with what system infidels promise to supply its place; and whether this substitute will serve better than religion, as a source of wisdom and a rule of life; will contribute more effectually to your intellectual and moral perfection?

You are now entering upon life, without having thought much of its duties, and it is probable, having still less considered its difficulties.—But life is not a mere play, a pastime for the giddy and the idle, a succession of frivolous amusements. It has serious business attached to it, and brings along with it in its progress, many evils both physical and moral. Is it by the principles of infidelity that you will be trained for

the bustling, trying scene ; disciplined for the duty, the resistance, the patience, the self-command, which its varying postures may require ? Will they prove a safeguard to your integrity, amidst strong temptations to falsehood and injustice ? Will they support your virtue, when assailed by the blandishments of vice ? Are these the principles which it would be safe to carry into the details of life, into the bosom of families ; by which you would wish your nearest and most tender relatives to be governed ; which you would be pleased to see reduced to practice by those, on whose good behavior your honor, your peace, and your interest may depend ? Can they inspire that fortitude which nobly sustains the spirit in adversity ? Have they any sovereign antidote to administer against the fretting, rankling influence of pain and disappointment ? What sanctuary do they open for the reception of the persecuted and forlorn ? what consolation do they provide for the oppressed, the poor, the broken-hearted ; for those who have been wounded by the poisoned shafts of calumny, and for those who are shedding tears of hopeless sorrow over the graves of their friends ?

Of all concerns, there is none so momentous and interesting as that about which you are now called upon to decide ;—whether you shall hold by the Scriptures, or adopt any of the modern systems of unbelief, it is a decision for this world and for the next, as virtue or vice, the approbation or the reproaches of your own minds, if they do not lose all sensibility and final happiness or misery will be the result of your choice. Review, then, with attention, the arguments which have been produced in favor of the Bible. Ask your reason, whether it be possible, that a book so attested and confirmed should be an imposture ; and whether evidence so clear and full should be set aside on account of a few difficulties which you cannot solve, or because some restrictions are imposed, which seem to intrench upon your natural liberty. At the tribunal of free and unbiassed reason, we are willing, that the cause of revelation should be tried. Let truth and duty be the only objects of your inquiries ; and the issue will be such as we wish it. “If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding ; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures ; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”*

To such of my readers as are fully persuaded of the Divine authority of the Scriptures, I beg leave to address the few following exhortations.

First, Be thankful for the Scriptures. All the proofs of their inspiration conspire to show you that it is an inestimable treasure of which you are possessed. The Bible is the Word of God. It is “more to be desired,” as the Psalmist says, “than gold, yea, than much fine gold ; it is sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb.”† It is the map which shows the road leading to the heavenly Canaan, and to the Zion above. It is our charter to the everlasting inheritance ; it is the guide of our youth, and the staff of our old age. To the Scriptures we are indebted for those views of the Divine character which relieve and comfort us. They unfold the excellencies of our Redeemer, the wonders of his love, the immense stores of his grace, the attractive beauties of his example. They supply motives of the sweetest and most powerful na-

* Prov. ii. 3—5.

† Psalm xix. 10.

re, which engage our affections, and carry us forward in the service of God, not only with pleasure, but to a degree of perfection, which we could not have attained by a cold sense of duty, or under the influence of fear. They set before us a law, righteous, good, and, through the gift of Divine grace, easy, by observing which we glorify God, and promote the peace of our own minds. By their light, the horrors of the world are dispelled, and we descry beyond it another and a better world, where we shall enjoy repose after our toils, find a refuge from all the ills of life, receive the reward of our labors, and rise to the utmost perfection and felicity of which our nature is capable. Are you borne down under a load of sorrows? are you enabled to triumph over temptation? do you taste the delights, and feel the raptures of prayer, and holy meditation? when you languish, are your spirits revived? when you begin to faint, is your vigor restored? These are the happy effects of the doctrines, the exhortations, the promises, the examples of the Scriptures; and, as these writings are Divine, the dictates of immutable truth and infinite goodness, the joys which they create are not delusive, and the hopes which they inspire, cannot be disappointed. Be thankful, therefore, for the Scriptures.

Secondly, Be on your guard against the attempts of those who would overthrow your faith in the Scriptures. Persons engaged in this malicious design have appeared in every period of the christian church; but at present they are uncommonly numerous and active. This, we are told, is the age of reason; and its claim to this high character is proved by hostility to all ancient institutions, whether civil or religious. Innovation is the order of the day; what is old, is instantly pronounced to be foolish and iniquitous; and the hasty productions of visionary and inexperienced projectors are hailed as the dictates of wisdom. We ought not, therefore, to be surprised, that the unusual fermentation of the human mind has given rise to endeavors to abolish christianity, as well as systems of government. Let the danger to which you are exposed rouse you to vigilance and activity, in repelling the assaults made upon your faith. It was always necessary, that the friends of the Gospel should know the grounds on which they believed it to be a Divine revelation; but it is peculiarly necessary at present, when the trial of their faith is uncommonly severe.

Study to be thoroughly acquainted with the manifold excellencies and uses of the scriptures, of which a slight view hath been given in the preceding exhortation. It is not to be wondered at, that they who hardly know any thing about the scriptures but their name, should be easily persuaded to renounce them. Like a blind man, they throw away a diamond which they mistake for a pebble. But he will not so easily part with them, who hath experienced the benefit of their instructions and counsels, on many important occasions; and into whose wounds they have poured the oil and wine of consolation. Infidels are all ignorant of the scriptures; unacquainted with the letter, or with the spirit. Many of them have never read them, but have formed their opinion of them upon trust, from the misrepresentations, and sneers, and falsifications of their brethren in unbelief; and of those who have read them, we may safely say, what was said of Julian, that they did not understand them, because there was a veil of prejudice over their eyes.

Beware of the influence of the world upon your hearts, and of the pre-

velance of sinful dispositions. It is in the heart more than in the head, in the passions more than in the judgment, that infidels find the means of seduction. They would not, it is probable, have themselves been unbelievers, if they had not, in the first place, been lovers of sin; and their arguments would make few converts or none, if they were not assisted by certain inclinations, which the Scriptures condemn, but infidelity grants them full permission to indulge. "He that doth evil hateth the light."

Thirdly, read the Scriptures with humility of mind. We are not required to believe their inspiration without evidence; but having once ascertained this point, we should be satisfied, All that remains is to act the part of humble disciples, who are sensible that they are naturally destitute of spiritual wisdom, and are willing to be taught by him, who cannot err. We must sit down at the feet of Jesus, and receive the law from his mouth. Our reason is no farther necessary than to help us to examine the evidences of revelation, to understand the meaning of the words and phrases in which it is expressed, and to trace the connexion of its several parts. To presume to criticise the Scriptures, is, in effect, to deny their inspiration; for criticism is not applicable to a Divine production, but to a work of man, which may be compared with a standard, and may be found to be inaccurately executed.

It would be arrogant to set out in the perusal of the Scriptures, with a resolution not to be pleased, unless we fully understand them, and be able satisfactorily to account for every thing. There are mysteries in revelation, which astonish and overwhelm our reason; there are difficulties, which human wisdom will in vain endeavor to solve. Let us not be surprised and offended, when such things occur. Were we modest, did we consider our own ignorance and weakness, we would look for them. Observing difficulties and mysteries every where, even in the most common and familiar objects, we would expect to meet with them likewise in the Scriptures. To wonder, therefore, when we do meet with them, and to complain of revelation as not sufficiently simple and perspicuous, is to indicate that we had formed a very extravagant estimate of our intellectual powers. It is to wonder that we are not as wise as God, and that any thing in his nature and counsels should surpass our comprehension.

Humility is the first lesson, which is learned in the school of Christ; the first virtue required in his followers. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." "Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* If you will not read the Scriptures with humility, you will soon begin to doubt, and you will probably end in denying, their Divinity.

Fourthly, Be careful at all times to treat the Scriptures with profound reverence. They are the word of that Being, whose voice makes the pillars of heaven to tremble, and in whose presence the loftiest angels prostrate themselves with humility and holy fear. To sit down, therefore, in a light and thoughtless state of mind to peruse them; to read them with the same indifference, with which we would look over some idle story, or uninteresting dissertation; to suffer our attention to be diverted by every vanity which intrudes itself; to think and speak of their

* Mat. xvi. 24. xviii. 8.

nents with indecent levity and familiarity, is to offer an insult to Him, whose will they declare, and of whose majesty and glory they bear manifest signatures. We should study to feel the same awe upon our spirits, as if God audibly addressed us. We should endeavor to possess composed and solemn frame of mind, arising from the consideration, not only of their Author, but likewise of our interest in them ; and leading us to banish every thought tending to counteract the impressions, which they are calculated to make upon our hearts. How holy and venerable, we should say, is this book which we take into our hands ? It was dictated by infallible wisdom : it is sanctioned by the highest authority in the universe ; it is the law, by which we shall be judged ; it is the messenger of life or of death.

In this place, I cannot forbear to warn the reader against the profane practice of jesting on the Scriptures, or of introducing any of the stories and expressions which occur in them, to enliven conversation, and excite the laughter of the company. To hear jests of this nature uttered by an infidel would not surprise us ; but how must every pious person be shocked, when they proceed from the mouth of a professed friend of revelation ! The wit, which consists in an unseasonable application of the Scriptures, is not of difficult attainment, as is evident from this consideration, that it is within the reach of almost any person who chooses to display it. Accordingly we observe that the dullest and most phlegmatic creatures, whose ideas and conversation are usually sluggish, and insipid, are occasionally able, by the help of the Scriptures, to produce among their fellows a momentary flash of merriment. The language of the sacred books occurs without an effort ; and when applied to some unexpected subject, it has a ludicrous effect, by the grotesque mixture of majesty and meanness, of what is solemn, and what is familiar or trifling. It requires no greater dexterity to form such an association, than to expose a grave and respectable man to the laughter of the mob, by putting a fool's cap on his head, or by distorting and disfiguring his dress. Such wit, it hath been well said, a man of taste will despise for its vulgarity ; and a good man will abhor for its profaneness. If there be jestings which are not convenient, those which have Divine things for their subject, are without dispute among the number. A habitual belief of the presence of God, would make us afraid to sport with his words. That jest would better be spared, which, while it contributes to the amusement of irreligious companions, provokes the indignation of Heaven, and exposes the jester to a punishment, which will make him serious and sad forever.

Fifthly, Remember that the Scriptures must be received with a Divine faith. The arguments, advanced in the preceding chapters, authorize us to hold their inspiration ; but the persuasion flowing from them is not properly *faith*, which is founded upon testimony, but *conviction* and *moral certainty*. I acknowledge, that this distinction is not always observed, either in the language of theologians, or even in the Scriptures, in which persons are sometimes said to *believe* on the evidence of miracles ; but the things themselves are clearly distinguished. Bare argumentation, or moral suasion is represented as ineffectual to produce faith, which interests us in the blessings of the Gospel, and applies divine truths to practical uses. The design of the foregoing reasoning solely to prove that the Scriptures are the word of God, and ought

to be believed ; saving faith must be generated by some other means. When God, shining upon his word, discovers to us its intrinsic excellencies, those glories which a natural man cannot perceive, and makes our consciences feel his authority in it ; when he says, as in the beginning, " Let there be light," and calls " the things which are not to be as though they were," the grace of faith is created in our souls. We are then disposed and enabled to yield to the Scriptures, not a cold and languid assent, but an assent, in which the heart concurs, embracing as good those doctrines, which the understanding discerns to be at once true, and worthy of all acceptation. Let us say, therefore, in our prayers : " Open thou our eyes, that we may see wondrous things out of thy law. May God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The knowledge of the Scriptures, which is the effect of spiritual illumination, will more completely secure you against the arts of infidelity, than all the arguments which have been brought forward to prove their inspiration. It is accompanied with an experience of the power and comforts of the truth, and no reasoning against the Scriptures, will persuade a man in contradiction to his feelings. He who could not answer the philosopher's objections against motion, rose up, and walked. When the Christian cannot find a reply to the cavils of the unbeliever, he can appeal to the state of his heart. He hath the witness in himself, that the Scriptures are true. I cannot forbear to apply to the present subject, the following beautiful and apposite words : " sceptics may wrangle, and mockers may blaspheme, but the pious man knows, by evidence too sublime for their comprehension, that his affections are not misplaced, and that his hopes shall not be disappointed ; by evidence which, to every sound mind, is fully satisfactory, but which, to the humble and tender-hearted, is altogether overwhelming, irresistible, and Divine."^{*}

In the sixth place, Make yourselves familiarly acquainted with the Scriptures. As they were given by inspiration of God, we expect them to be, in all respects, worthy of his wisdom and grace, and to be suited to the diversified circumstances and conditions of mankind. Accordingly an apostle informs us, that " they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."[†] They are a rich treasury, from which all our wants may be supplied ; they are a magazine, stored with every thing necessary for the support and the defence of the Christian. With what diligence and attention should they be read ? With how much care should they be laid up in our hearts ? Doctrines, promises, precepts, and examples, are of no benefit to us, while they are suffered to remain in the sacred books. They become useful, only when they are transferred into our minds, by reading and meditation. In the one case, they are as wholesome, nutritious food placed before us ; in the other, they are as food swallowed and digested. The Christian who is not conversant with the Scriptures, must often be perplexed and thrown into distress, like the mariner without his compass, when he hath lost sight of land. But a store of Scriptural know-

* Dr. Beattie's Essay on Truth, part i. chap. ii. 5.

† 2 Tim. iii. 16.

edge is a source of manifold advantages. It enables us to detect errors, which artful men would impose upon us as truths, to answer the objections of adversaries, to reply to temptations and overcome them, to regulate our conduct in every emergency, and to comfort ourselves in the season of affliction.

Lastly, Let the Scriptures be the only rule of your faith and manners. They are entitled to this rank and dignity, from their fulness and perfection, and from the authority of him by whom they were dictated. The Holy Ghost, speaking in them, is the Supreme Judge of all controversies in religion. To his decision, therefore, all our opinions, and those of other men, should be submitted; and by his decision, whatever it may be, we should abide. The law revealed in the Scriptures, is the only rule of our duty. No other law is obligatory on conscience. Other men may be regulated by the traditions of their fathers, the decrees of the church, the peculiarities of a party, the whims and mandates of a leader; but we are bound to hear Christ alone speaking in the Scriptures. By making them, and not any human creed, the standard of our faith and obedience, we give them the honor to which they have an undoubted claim. We recognize their supreme authority; we acquiesce in them as the dictates of infallible wisdom.

That union of Christians, for which we all profess to long, will not be effected, till all parties, laying aside prejudices, and disclaiming human authorities, resolve, in forming their religious principles, to consult the Scriptures alone. When that happy period shall arrive, I am persuaded that their sentiments will harmonize much beyond what we can now prevail upon ourselves to believe; and without harmony of sentiment, experience assures us, that there can be no cordial co-operation.

Let our conduct on all occasions attest, that we do indeed assign to the Word of God, that high rank and authority, to which it is entitled. When we renounce fashionable opinions and practices, because it condemns them; when we perform with alacrity the duties which it enjoins, though irksome to flesh and blood; when our deportment in the various relations and occurrences of life is formed upon its precepts and examples, it will be manifest, that our faith is firm, and our respect for it is sincere. Few of us are qualified to reason in behalf of our religion with its adversaries; but we may all "hold it forth in our conversation," and recommend it to the world, by displaying its happy influence in rendering those who believe it amiable and useful. "We do not speak, but we live great things," says an ancient apologist for Christianity. It is by the silent but powerful eloquence of our lives, that we should daily plead the cause of revelation. The Scriptures are "a light shining in a dark place, to which we do well to take heed, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise upon us." Happy are they who keep their eyes continually fixed upon it. It will guide them safely amidst the devious paths of life, and bring them to that blessed world, where every cloud, which now hangs upon the ways of God, shall be dispelled; every doubt, by which their minds are perplexed, shall be removed; every humble and anxious inquiry shall be satisfied, and they shall "know even as they are known."

INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE.

On casting a survey over the different orders into which society is distributed, I am at an utter loss to fix on any description of persons who are likely to be injured by the most extensive perusal of the word of God. The poor, we may be certain, will sustain no injury from their attention to a book which while it inculcates, under the most awful sanctions, the practice of honesty, industry, frugality, subordination to lawful authority, contentment, and resignation to the allotments of Providence, elevates them to the hope of "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" a book, which at once secures the observation of the duties which attach to an inferior condition, and almost annihilates its evils, by opening their prospects into a state where all the inequalities of fortune will vanish, and the obscurest and most neglected piety shall be crowned with eternal glory. "The poor man rejoices that he is exalted;" and while he views himself as the member of Christ, and the heir of a blessed immortality, he can look with undissembled pity on the frivolous distinctions, the fruitless agitations, and the fugitive enjoyments of the most eminent and the most prosperous of those who have their portion in this world. The poor man will sustain no injury by exchanging the vexations of envy for the quiet of a good conscience, and fruitless repinings for the consolations of religious hope. The less is his portion in this life, the more ardently will he cherish and embrace the promise of a better, while the hope of that better exerts a reciprocal influence, in prompting him to discharge the duties, and reconciling him to the evils, which are inseparable from the present. The Bible is the treasure of the poor, the solace of the sick, and the support of the dying; and while other books may amuse and instruct in a leisure hour, it is the peculiar triumph of that book to create light in the midst of darkness, to alleviate the sorrow which admits of no other alleviation, to direct a beam of hope to the heart which no other topic of consolation can reach; while guilt, despair, and death vanish at the touch of its holy inspiration. There is something in the spirit and diction of the Bible which is found peculiarly adapted to arrest the attention of the plainest and most uncultivated minds. The simple structure of its sentences, combined with a lofty spirit of poetry,—its familiar allusions to the scenes of nature, and the transactions of common life,—the delightful intermixture of narration with the doctrinal and preceptive parts,—and the profusion of miraculous facts, which convert it into a sort of enchanted ground,—its constant advertence to the Deity, whose perfections it renders almost visible and palpable,—unite in bestowing upon it an interest which attaches to no other performance, and which, after assiduous and repeated perusal, invests it with much of the charm of novelty: like the great orb of day, at which we are wont to gaze with unabated astonishment from infancy to old age. What other book besides the Bible could be heard in public assemblies from year to year with an attention that never tires, and an interest that never cloy? With few exceptions, let a portion of the sacred volume be recited in a mixed multitude, and though it has been heard a thousand times, a universal stillness ensues, every eye is fixed, and every ear is awake and attentive. Select, if you can, any other composition, and let it be rendered equally familiar to the mind, and see whether it will produce this effect.

R. HALL.

20 17
A VIEW

OF THE

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

BY SOAME JENYNS, ESQ.

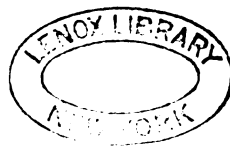
"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."—Acts xxi. 23.

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A

VIEW OF THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Most of the writers, who have undertaken to prove the Divine origin of the Christian religion, have had recourse to arguments drawn from these three heads: The prophecies still extant in the Old Testament, the miracles recorded in the New, or the internal evidence arising from that excellence, and those clear marks of supernatural interposition, which are so conspicuous in the religion itself. The two former have been sufficiently explained and enforced by the ablest pens; but the last, which seems to carry with it the greatest degree of conviction, has never, I think, been considered with that attention which it deserves.

I mean not here to depreciate the proofs arising from either prophecies, or miracles; they both have or ought to have their proper weight; prophecies are permanent miracles, whose authority is sufficiently confirmed by their completion, and are therefore solid proofs of the supernatural origin of a religion, whose truth they were intended to testify; such are those to be found in various parts of the Scriptures relative to the coming of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unexampled state in which the Jews have ever since continued, all so circumstantially descriptive of the events, that they seem rather histories of past, than predictions of future transactions; and whoever will seriously consider the immense distance of time between some of them and the events which they foretell, the uninterrupted chain by which they are connected for many thousand years, how exactly they correspond with those events, and how totally unapplicable they are to all others in the history of mankind; I say, whoever considers these circumstances, he will scarcely be persuaded to believe, that they can be the productions of preceding artifice, or posterior application, or can entertain the least doubt of their being derived from supernatural inspiration.

The miracles recorded in the New Testament to have been performed by Christ and his apostles, were certainly convincing proofs of their Divine commission to those who saw them; and as they were seen by such numbers, and are as well attested as other historical facts, and, above all, as they were wrought on so great and so wonderful an occasion, they must still be admitted as evidence of no inconsiderable force; but, I think, they must now depend for much of their credibility on the truth of that religion, whose credibility they were intended to support. To prove, therefore, the truth of the Christian religion, we should begin by showing the internal marks of Divinity, which are stamped upon it; recourse on this the credibility of the prophecies and miracles in a great

measure depends: for if we have once reason to be convinced, that this religion is derived from a supernatural origin; prophecies and miracles will become so far from being incredible, that it will be highly probable, that a supernatural revelation should be foretold and enforced by supernatural means.

What pure Christianity is, divested of all its ornaments, appendages, and corruption, I pretend not to say; but what it is not, I will venture to affirm, which is, that it is not the offspring of fraud or fiction. Such on a superficial view, I know it must appear to every man of good sense, whose sense has been altogether employed on other subjects; but if any one will give himself the trouble to examine it with accuracy and candor, he will plainly see, that however fraud and fiction may have grown up with it, yet it never could have been grafted on the same stock, nor planted by the same hand.

To ascertain the true system and genuine doctrines of this religion, after the undecided controversies of above seventeen centuries, and to remove all the rubbish which artifice and ignorance have been heaping upon it during all that time, would indeed be an arduous task, which I shall by no means undertake; but to show, that it cannot possibly be derived from human wisdom, or human imposture is a work, I think, attended with no great difficulty, and requiring no extraordinary abilities, and therefore I shall attempt that, and that alone, by stating and then explaining, the following plain and undeniable propositions.

First, that there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament.

Secondly, that from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely superior to, but unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, that from this book may likewise be collected a system of Ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles is totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

Lastly, that such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men; much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons, who actually did discover, and publish it to the world; and that, therefore, it must undoubtedly have been effected by the interposition of Divine power, that is, that it must derive its origin from God.

PROPOSITION I.

VERY little need be said to establish my first proposition, which is singly this:—That there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament: that is, there is a collection of writings, distinguished by that denomination, containing four historical accounts of the birth, life, actions, discourses, and death of an extraordinary person named Jesus Christ, who was born in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, preached a new religion throughout the country of Judea, and was put to a cruel and ignominious death in the reign of Tiberius. Also one other historical

of the travels, transactions, and orations of some mean and illiterate, known by the title of his apostles, whom he commissioned to propagate his religion after his death; which he foretold them he would confirm by the confirmation of its truth. To these are added several writings, addressed by these persons to their fellow-laborers, either to the several churches or societies of Christians, which were established in the several cities through which they had passed. It is not difficult to prove, that these books were written soon after extraordinary events, which are the subjects of them; as we are quoted, and referred to by an uninterrupted succession of authors from those to the present times; nor would it be less easy to prove the truth of all those events, miracles only excepted, can no more reasonably be questioned, than the truth of any other facts in any history whatever; and there can be no more reason to suppose that there existed such a person as Jesus Christ, speaking, acting, and writing in such a manner as is there described, than that there were such men as Tiberius, Herod, or Pontius Pilate, his contemporaries, to suspect, that Peter, Paul, and James were not the authors of the epistles, to which their names are affixed, than that Cicero did not write those which are ascribed to them. It might also appear, that these books, having been wrote by various authors at different times, and in distant places, could not possibly have been the work of a single imposter, nor of a fraudulent combination, stamped with the same marks of a uniform originality in their style and composition.

These circumstances I shall pass over unobserved, as they do not follow with the course of my argument, nor are necessary for the purpose of it. Whether these books were wrote by the authors whose names are prefixed to them, whether they have been enlarged, diminished, or in any way corrupted by the artifice or ignorance of translators, or by the partiality of the writers; whether in the historical parts the writers were instructed by the apostles, or by any inspiration at all; whether in the civil and moral parts, they received their doctrines from a superior authority, or from the instructions and conversation of their superiors; whether in their facts or sentiments there is always the most exact agreement, or whether in both they sometimes differ from each other, or whether they are in any case mistaken, or always infallible, or whether they are intended to be so, I shall not here dispute; let the deist avail himself of all these doubts and difficulties, and decide them in conformity with his own opinions: I shall not contend, because they affect not me. All that I assert is a plain fact, which cannot be denied, that these writings do now exist.

PROPOSITION II.

The second proposition is not quite so simple, but, I think, not less true than the former, and is this:—That from this book may be derived a new system of religion entirely new, both with regard to the objects and doctrines; not only infinitely superior to, but totally unlike the former; which had ever before entered into the mind of man. I assert this, because all the doctrines of this religion having been de-

livered at various times, and on various occasions, and here only historically recorded, no uniform or regular system of theology is here to be found; and better perhaps, it had been, if less labor had been employed by the learned, to bend and twist these Divine materials into the polished forms of human systems, to which they never will submit, and for which they were never intended by their great Author. Why he chose not to leave any such behind him we know not, but it might possibly be, because he knew, that the imperfection of man was incapable of receiving such a system, and that we are more properly, and more safely conducted by the distant and scattered rays, than by the too powerful sunshine of Divine illumination. "If I have told you earthly things," says he, "and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" (John iii. 12) that is, if my instructions, concerning your behaviour in the present as relative to a future life, are so difficult to be understood, that you can scarcely believe me, how shall you believe, if I endeavored to explain to you the nature of celestial beings, the designs of Providence, and the mysteries of his dispensation; subjects which you have neither ideas to comprehend, nor language to express?

First, then, the object of this religion is entirely new, and is this, to prepare us by a state of probation for the kingdom of heaven. This is everywhere professed by Christ and his apostles to be the chief end of the Christian's life; the crown for which he is to contend, the goal to which he is to run, the harvest which is to pay him for all his labors. Yet, previous to their preaching, no such prize was ever hung out to mankind, nor any means prescribed for the attainment of it.

It is indeed true, that some of the philosophers, of antiquity entertained notions of a future state, but mixed with much doubt and uncertainty. Their legislators also endeavored to infuse into the minds of the people a belief of rewards and punishments after death, but by this they only intended to give a sanction to their laws; and to enforce the practice of virtue for the benefit of mankind in the present life. This alone seems to have been their end, and a meritorious end it was; but Christianity not only operates more effectually to this end, but has a nobler design in view, which is by a proper education here, to render us fit members of a celestial society hereafter. In all former religions the good of the present life was the first object; in the Christian it is but the second; in those, men were incited to promote that good by the hopes of a future reward; in this, the practice of virtue is enjoined in order to qualify them for that reward. There is great difference, I apprehend, in these two plans, that is in adhering to virtue from its present utility in expectation of future happiness, and living in such a manner as to qualify us for the acceptance and enjoyment of that happiness; and the conduct and dispositions of those, who act on these different principles, must be no less different. On the first, the constant practice of justice, temperance, and sobriety, will be sufficient; but on the latter, we must add to these an habitual piety, faith, resignation, and contempt of the world. The first may make us very good citizens, but will never produce a tolerable Christian. Hence it is that Christianity insists more strongly, than any preceding institution, religious or moral, on purity of heart, and a benevolent disposition; because these are absolutely necessary to its great end; but in those, whose recom-

foundations of virtue regard the present life only, and whose promised rewards in another were low and sensual, no preparatory qualifications were requisite to enable men to practice the one, or to enjoy the other. And, therefore, we see this object is peculiar to this religion; and with was entirely new.

But although this object, and the principle on which it is founded, were new, and perhaps undiscoverable by reason, yet when discovered, they are so consonant to it, that we cannot but readily assent to them. And the truth of this principle, that the present life is a state of probation and education to prepare us for another, is confirmed by every thing which we see around us; it is the only key which can open to us the designs of Providence in the economy of human affairs, the only clue which can guide us through that pathless wilderness, and the only plan by which this world could possibly have been formed, or on which the history of it can be comprehended or explained. It could never have been formed on a plan of happiness; because it is every where overladen with innumerable miseries; nor of misery, because it is interspersed with many enjoyments. It could not have been constituted for a scene of wisdom and virtue, because the history of mankind is little more than a detail of their follies and wickedness; nor of vice, because it is no plan at all, being destructive of all existence, and consequently of its own. But on this system all that we here meet with may be easily accounted for; for this mixture of happiness and misery, of virtue and vice, necessarily results from a state of probation and education; probation implies trials, sufferings, and a capacity of offending, and education a propriety of chastisement for those offences.

In the next place the doctrines of this religion are equally new with the object; and contain ideas of God, and of man, of the present, and of a future life, and of the relations which all these bear to each other, totally unheard of, and quite dissimilar from any which had ever been brought on, previous to its publication. No other ever drew so just a portrait of the worthlessness of this world, and all its pursuits, nor exhibited such distinct, lively, and exquisite pictures of the joys of another; of the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that tremendous day, "when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality." (1 Cor. 15. 53.) No other has ever represented the Supreme Being in the character of three persons united in one God.* No other has attempted to reconcile those seeming contradictory but both true propositions, the contingency of future events, and the foreknowledge of God, or the free-will of the creature with the overruling grace of the Creator. No other has so fully declared the necessity of wickedness and punishment, yet has so effectually instructed individuals to resist the one, and to escape the other: no other has ever pretended to give any account of the depravity of man, or to point out any remedy for it: no other has ventured to declare the unpardonable nature of sin without the influence of a mediatorial interposition, and a vicarious atonement from the sufferings of a

* That there subsists some such union in the Divine nature, the whole tenor of the New Testament seems to express, and it was so understood in the earliest ages; but whether this union does or does not imply equality, or whether it subsists in general, or only in particular circumstances, we are not informed, and therefore on these questions it is not only unnecessary, but improper for us to decide.

Superior Being.* Whether these wonderful doctrines are worthy of our belief must depend on the opinion, which we entertain of the authority of those, who published them to the world; but certain it is, that they are all so far removed from every tract of the human imagination, that it seems equally impossible, that they should ever have been derived from the knowledge, or the artifice of man.

Some indeed there are, who, by perverting the established signification of words (which they call explaining,) have ventured to expunge all these doctrines out of the Scriptures, for no other reason than that they are not able to comprehend them; and argue thus: The Scriptures are the word of God; in his word no propositions contradictory to reason can have a place; these propositions are contradictory to reason, and therefore they are not there: but if these bold asserters would claim any regard, they should reverse their argument and say, these doctrines make a part, and a material part of the Scriptures, they are contradictory to reason; no propositions contrary to reason can be a part of the word of God, and therefore neither the Scriptures, nor the pretended revelation contained in them, can be derived from him: this would be an argument worthy of rational and candid Deists, and demand a respectful attention; but when men pretend to disprove facts by reasoning, they have no right to expect an answer.

And here I cannot omit observing, that the personal character of the author of this religion is no less new, and extraordinary than, the religion itself, "who spake as never man spake" (John vii. 46,) and lived as never man lived: in proof of this, I do not mean to allege, that he was born of a virgin, that he fasted forty days, that he performed a variety of miracles, and after being buried three days, that he arose from the dead; because these accounts will have but little effect on the minds of unbelievers, who, if they believe not the religion, will give no credit to the relation of these facts; but I will prove it from facts which cannot be disputed; for instance, he is the only founder of a religion in the history of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and therefore totally unconducive to any worldly purpose whatever: all others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their respective people; but Christ neither aimed at, nor would accept of any such power: he rejected every object, which all other men pursue, and made choice of all those which others fly from, and are afraid of: he refused power, riches, honors, and pleasure, and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have been the enthusiasts and impostors, who have endeavored to impose on the world pretended revelations, and some of them from pride, obstinacy, or principle, have gone so far as to lay down their lives rather than retract; but I defy history to show one, who ever made his own sufferings and death a necessary part of his original plan, and essential to his mission; this Christ actually did; he foresaw, foretold, declared their necessity, and voluntarily endured them. If we seriously contemplate the Divine

* That Christ suffered and died, as an atonement for the sins of mankind, is a doctrine so constantly and so strongly enforced through every part of the New Testament, that whoever will seriously peruse those writings, and deny that it is there, may, with as much reason and truth, after reading the works of Thucydides and Livy, assert, that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the histories of Greece and Rome.

ssons, the perfect precepts, the beautiful discourses, and the consistent induct of this wonderful person, we cannot possibly imagine, that he could have been either an idiot or a madman; and yet, if he was not that he pretended to be, he can be considered in no other light; and even under this character he would deserve some attention, because of the sublime and rational an insanity there is no other instance in the story of mankind.

If any one can doubt of the superior excellence of this religion above all which preceded it, let him but peruse with attention those unparalleled writings in which it is transmitted to the present times, and compare them with the most celebrated productions of the pagan world; and he is not sensible of their superior beauty, simplicity, and originality, will venture to pronounce, that he is as deficient in taste as in faith, and that he is as bad a critic as a Christian: for in what school of ancient philosophy can he find a lesson of morality so perfect as Christ's sermon on the mount? From which of them can he collect an address of the Deity so concise, and yet so comprehensive, so expressive of all that we want, and all that we could deprecate, as that short prayer, which he formed for, and recommended to his disciples? From the works of what sage of antiquity can he produce so pathetic a recommendation of benevolence to the distressed, and enforced by such assurances of a reward, as in those words of Christ?—"Come, ye blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; I was naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee, or thirsty and gave thee drink? when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in, or naked and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick and in prison, and came unto thee? Then shall I answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. xxv. 34.) Where is there so just, and so elegant a reproof of eagerness and anxiety in worldly pursuits, closed with so forcible an exhortation to confidence in the goodness of our Creator, as in these words?—"Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these; wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you? O ye of little faith!" (Matt. vi. 26. 3.) By which of their most celebrated poets are the joys reserved for the righteous in a future state so sublimely described, as by this short declaration, that they are superior to all description?—"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. ii. 9.) Where, amidst the dark clouds of pagan philosophy, can he show such a clear prospect of a future state, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and the general judgment, as in St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians? Or from whence can he produce such

cogent exhortations to the practice of every virtue, such ardent incitements to piety and devotion, and such assistances to attain them, as those which are to be met with throughout every page of these inimitable writings? To quote all the passages in them, relative to these subjects, would be almost to transcribe the whole; it is sufficient to observe, that they are every where stamped with such apparent marks of supernatural assistance, as render them indisputably superior to, and totally unlike all human compositions whatever; and this superiority and dissimilarity is still more strongly marked by one remarkable circumstance peculiar to themselves which is, that whilst the moral parts, being of the most general use, are intelligible to the meanest capacities, the learned and inquisitive, throughout all ages, perpetually find in them inexhaustible discoveries, concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of Providence.

To say the truth, before the appearance of Christianity there existed nothing like religion on the face of the earth; the Jewish only excepted: all other nations were immersed in the grossest idolatry, which had little or no connexion with morality, except to corrupt it by the infamous examples of their own imaginary deities; they all worshipped a multiplicity of gods and demons, whose favor they courted by impious, obscene, and ridiculous ceremonies, and whose anger they endeavored to appease by the most abominable cruelties. In the politest ages of the politest nations in the world, at a time when Greece and Rome had carried the arts of oratory, poetry, history, architecture, and sculpture to the highest perfection, and made no inconsiderable advances in those of mathematics, natural, and even moral philosophy, in religious knowledge they had made none at all; a strong presumption, that the noblest efforts of the mind of man unassisted by revelation were unequal to the task. Some few, indeed, of their philosophers were wise enough to reject these general absurdities, and dared to attempt a loftier flight: Plato introduced many sublime ideas of nature, and its first cause, and of the immortality of the soul, which being above his own and all human discovery, he probably acquired from the books of Moses or the conversation of some Jewish rabbies, which he might have met with in Egypt, where he resided, and studied for several years: from him Aristotle, and from both Cicero and some few others drew most amazing stores of philosophical science, and carried their researches into Divine truths as far as human genius alone could penetrate. But these were bright constellations, which appeared singly in several centuries, and even these with all this knowledge were very deficient in true theology. From the visible works of the creation they traced the being and principal attributes of the Creator; but the relation which his being and attributes bear to man they little understood; of piety and devotion they had scarce any sense, nor could they form any mode of worship worthy of the purity and perfection of the Divine nature: they occasionally flung out many elegant encomiums on the native beauty and excellence of virtue; but they founded it not on the commands of God, nor connected it with a holy life, nor hung out the happiness of heaven as its reward, or its object. They sometimes talked of virtue carrying men to heaven, and placing them amongst the gods; but by this virtue they meant only the invention of arts, or feats of arms: for with them heaven was open only to legislators and conquerors, the civilizers or destroyers of man-

kind. This was, then, the summit of religion in the most polished nations in the world, and even this was confined to a few philosophers, prodigies of genius and literature, who were little attended to, and less understood by the generality of mankind in their own countries; whilst all the rest were involved in one common cloud of ignorance and superstition.

At this time Christianity broke forth from the east like a rising sun, and dispelled this universal darkness, which obscured every part of the globe, and even at this day prevails in all those remoter regions, to which its salutary influence has not as yet extended. From all those which it has reached, it has, notwithstanding its corruptions, banished all those enormities, and introduced a more rational devotion, and purer morals: it has taught men the unity and attributes of the Supreme Being, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead, life everlasting, and the kingdom of heaven; doctrines as inconceivable to the wisest of mankind antecedent to its appearance, as the Newtonian system is at this day to the most ignorant tribes of savages in the wilds of America; doctrines which human reason never could have discovered, but which, when discovered, coincide with, and are confirmed by it; and which, though beyond the reach of all the learning and penetration of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, are now clearly laid open to the eye of every peasant and mechanic with the Bible in his hand. These are all plain facts, too glaring to be contradicted, and therefore, whatever we may think of the authority of these books, the relations which they contain, or the inspiration of their authors, of these facts, no man, who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, can entertain a doubt; because there are the books, and in them is this religion.

PROPOSITION III.

My third proposition is this; that from this book, called the New Testament, may be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection than in any other of the ancient philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles is entirely omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

By moral precepts founded on reason, I mean all those, which enforce the practice of such duties as reason informs us must improve our nature, and conduce to the happiness of mankind: such are piety to God, benevolence to men, justice, charity, temperance, and sobriety, with all those, which prohibit the commission of the contrary vices, all which debase our natures, and, by mutual injuries, introduce universal disorder, and consequently universal misery. By precepts founded on false principles, I mean those, which recommend fictitious virtues productive of none of these salutary effects, and therefore, however celebrated and admired, are in fact no virtues at all; such are valor, patriotism, and friendship.

That virtues of the first kind are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection by the Christian religion than by any other, it is here unnecessary to prove, because this is a truth which has been frequently demonstrated by her friends, and never once denied by the most deter-

mined of her adversaries ; but it will be proper to show, that those of the latter sort are most judiciously omitted ; because they have really no intrinsic merit in them, and are totally incompatible with the genius and spirit of this institution.

Valor, for instance, or active courage, is for the most part constitutional, and therefore can have no more claim to moral merit, than wit, beauty, health, strength, or any other endowment of the mind or body ; and so far is it from producing any salutary effects by introducing peace, order, or happiness into society, that it is the usual perpetrator of all the violences, which from retaliated injuries distract the world with bloodshed and devastation. It is the engine by which the strong are enabled to plunder the weak, the proud to trample upon the humble, and the guilty to oppress the innocent ; it is the chief instrument which ambition employs in her unjust pursuits of wealth and power, and is therefore so much extolled by her votaries : it was indeed congenial with the religion of pagans, whose gods were, for the most part, made out of deceased heroes, exalted to heaven as a reward for the mischiefs which they had perpetrated upon earth, and therefore with them this was the first of virtues, and had even engrossed that denomination to itself ; but whatever merit it may have assumed among pagans, with Christians it can pretend to none, and few or none are the occasions in which they are permitted to exert it : they are so far from being allowed to inflict evil, that they are forbid even to resist it ; they are so far from being encouraged to revenge injuries, that one of their first duties is to forgive them ; so far from being incited to destroy their enemies, that they are commanded to love them, and to serve them to the utmost of their power. If Christian nations therefore were nations of Christians, all war would be impossible and unknown amongst them, and valor could be neither of use or estimation, and therefore could never have a place in the catalogue of Christian virtues, being irreconcilable with all its precepts. I object not to the praise and honors bestowed on the valiant : they are the least tribute which can be paid them by those who enjoy safety and affluence by the intervention of their dangers and sufferings ; I assert only, that active courage can never be a Christian virtue, because a Christian can have nothing to do with it. Passive courage is indeed frequently and properly inculcated by this meek and suffering religion, under the titles of patience and resignation : a real and substantial virtue this, and a direct contrast to the former ; for passive courage arises from the noblest dispositions of the human mind, from a contempt of misfortunes, pain, and death, and a confidence in the protection of the Almighty : active from the meanest ; from passion, vanity, and self-dependence ; passive courage is derived from a zeal for truth, and a perseverance in duty ; active is the offspring of pride and revenge, and the parent of cruelty and injustice : in short, passive courage is the resolution of a philosopher, active the ferocity of a savage. Nor is this more incompatible with the precepts, than with the object of this religion, which is the attainment of the kingdom of heaven ; for valor is not that sort of violence, by which that kingdom is to be taken ; nor are the turbulent spirits of heroes and conquerors admissible into those regions of peace, subordination, and tranquility.

Patriotism also, that celebrated virtue, so much practised in ancient, and so much professed in modern times, that virtue which so long pre-

served the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the empire of the world : this celebrated virtue, I say, must also be excluded ; because it not only, falls short of, but directly counteracts the extensive benevolence of this religion. A Christian is of no country, he is a citizen of the world ; and his neighbors and countrymen are the inhabitants of the remotest regions, whenever their distresses demand his friendly assistance : Christianity commands us to love all mankind, patriotism to oppress all other countries to advance the imaginary prosperity of our own : Christianity enjoins us to imitate the universal benevolence of our Creator, who pours forth his blessings on every nation upon earth ; patriotism to copy the mean partiality of an English parish officer, who thinks injustice and cruelty meritorious, whenever they promote the interests of his own inconsiderable village. This has ever been a favorite virtue with mankind, because it conceals self-interest under the mask of public spirit, not only from others, but even from themselves, and gives a license to inflict wrongs and injuries, not only with impunity, but with applause ; but it is so diametrically opposite to the great characteristic of this institution, that it never could have been admitted into the list of Christian virtues.

Friendship, likewise, although more congenial to the principles of Christianity, arising from more tender and amiable dispositions, could never gain admittance amongst her benevolent precepts, for the same reason ; because it is too narrow and confined, and appropriates that benevolence to a single object, which is here commanded to be extended over all : where friendships arise from similarity of sentiments, and disinterested affections, they are advantageous, agreeable, and innocent, but have little pretensions to merit ; for it is justly observed, "If ye love them, which love you, what thank have ye ? for sinners also love those that love them." (Luke vi. 32.) But if they are formed from alliances in parties, factions, and interests, or from a participation of vices, the usual parents of what are called friendships among mankind, they are then both mischievous and criminal, and consequently forbidden ; but in their utmost purity deserve no recommendation from this religion.

To the judicious omission of these false virtues we may add that remarkable silence, which the Christian Legislator everywhere preserves on subjects esteemed by all others of the highest importance, civil government, national policy, and the rights of war and peace ; of these he has not taken the least notice, probably for this plain reason, because it would have been impossible to have formed any explicit regulations concerning them, which must not have been inconsistent with the purity of his religion, or with the practical observance of such imperfect creatures as men ruling over, and contending with each other. For instance, had he absolutely forbid all resistance to the reigning powers, he had constituted a plan of despotism, and made men slaves ; had he allowed it, he must have authorized disobedience, and made them rebels ; had he, in direct terms, prohibited all war, he must have left his followers for ever an easy prey to every infidel invader ; had he permitted it, he must have licensed all that rapine and murder with which it is unavoidably attended.

Let us now examine what are those new precepts in this religion peculiarly corresponding with the new object of it, that is, preparing us

for the kingdom of heaven. Of these the chief are poorness of spirit, forgiveness of injuries, and charity to all men; to these we may add repentance, faith, self-abasement, and a detachment from the world, all moral duties peculiar to this religion, and absolutely necessary to the attainment of its end.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. v. 3.) By which poorness of spirit is to be understood a disposition of mind, meek, humble, submissive to power, void of ambition, patient of injuries, and free from all resentment. This was so new, and so opposite to the ideas of all Pagan moralists, that they thought this temper of mind a criminal and contemptible meanness, which must induce men to sacrifice the glory of their country, and their own honor, to a shameful pusillanimity; and such it appears to almost all who are called Christians even at this day, who not only reject it in practice, but disavow it in principle, notwithstanding this explicit declaration of their Master. We see them revenging the smallest affronts by premeditated murder, as individuals, on principles of honor; and, in their national capacities, destroying each other with fire and sword, for the low considerations of commercial interests, the balance of rival powers, or the ambition of princes. We see them with their last breath animating each other to a savage revenge, and, in the agonies of death, plunging with feeble arms their daggers into the hearts of their opponents, and, what is still worse, we hear all these barbarisms celebrated by historians, flattered by poets, applauded in theatres, approved in senates, and even sanctified in pulpits. But universal practice cannot alter the nature of things, nor universal error change the nature of truth. Pride was not made for men, but humility, meekness, and resignation, that is, poorness of spirit, was made for man, and properly belongs to his dependent and precarious situation; and is the only disposition of mind, which can enable him to enjoy ease and quiet here, and happiness hereafter. Yet was this important precept entirely unknown until it was promulgated by him, who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven: Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." (Mark x. 14.)

Another precept, equally new and no less excellent, is forgiveness of injuries: "Ye have heard," says Christ to his disciples, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matt. v. 43.) This was a lesson so new, and so utterly unknown, till taught by his doctrines, and enforced by his example, that the wisest moralists of the wisest nations and ages represented the desire of revenge as a mark of a noble mind, and the accomplishment of it as one of the chief felicities attendant on a fortunate man. But how much more magnanimous, how much more beneficial to mankind, is forgiveness! it is more magnanimous, because every generous and exalted disposition of the human mind is requisite to the practice of it; for these alone can enable us to bear the wrongs and insults of wickedness and folly with patience, and to look down on the perpetrators of them with pity, rather than indignation; these alone can teach us, that such are but a part of those sufferings allotted to us in this state of probation

d to know, that to overcome evil with good is the most glorious of all stories: it is the most beneficial, because this amiable conduct alone n put an end to an eternal succession of injdries and retaliations; r every retaliation becomes a new injury, and requires another act of venge for satisfaction. But would we observe this salutary precept, love our enemies, and to do good to those who despitefully use us, is obstinate benevolence would at last conquer the most inveterate arts, and we should have no enemies to forgive. How much more alted a character therefore is a Christian martyr, suffering with resignation, and praying for the guilty, than that of a Pagan hero, breathing venge, and destroying the innocent? yet noble and useful as this virtue before the appearance of this religion it was not only unpractised, it decried in principle, as mean and ignominious, though so obvious remedy for most of the miseries of this life, and so necessary a qualification for the happiness of another.

A third precept, first noticed and first enjoined by this institution, is arity to all men. What this is, we may best learn from this admirable description, painted in the following words; "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but joiceth in truth; feareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things." (1 Cor. xiii. 4.) Here we have an accurate delineation of this bright constellation of all virtues, which consists not, as many imagine, in the building of monasteries, endowment of spitals, or the distribution of alms, but in such an amiable disposition of mind as exercises itself every hour in acts of kindness, patience, complacency, and benevolence to all around us, and which alone is able to promote happiness in the present life, or render us capable of receiving it in another: and yet this is totally new, and so it is declared to be by the author of it; "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another; by this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John xiii. 34.) This benevolent disposition is made the great characteristic of a Christian, the test of his obedience, and the mark by which he is to be distinguished. This love for each other is that charity just now described and contains all those qualities, which are there attributed to it; humility, patience, meekness, and beneficence: without which we must live in perpetual discord, and consequently cannot pay obedience to his commandment by loving one another; a commandment so sublime, so rational, and so beneficial, so wisely calculated to correct the depravity, diminish the wickedness, and abate the miseries of human nature, that, did we universally comply with it, we should soon be relieved from all the inquietudes arising from our own unruly passions, anger, envy, revenge, malice, and ambition, as well as from all those injuries, to which we are perpetually exposed from the indulgence of the same passions in others. It would so preserve our minds in such a state of tranquillity, and so prepare them for the kingdom of heaven, that we should slide out of a life of hate, love, and benevolence, into that celestial society, by an almost imperceptible transition. Yet was this commandment entirely new, when given by him, who so entitles it, and has made it the capital duty

of his religion, because the most indispensably necessary to the attainment of its great object, the kingdom of heaven; into which, if proud, turbulent, and vindictive spirits were permitted to enter, they must unavoidably destroy the happiness of that state, by the operations of the same passions and vices by which they disturb the present; and therefore all such must be eternally excluded, not only as a punishment, but also from incapacity.

Repentance, by this we plainly see, is another new moral duty strenuously insisted on by this religion, and by no other, because absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of its end; for this alone can purge us from those transgressions, from which we cannot be totally exempted in this state of trial and temptation, and purify us from that depravity in our nature, which renders us incapable of attaining this end. Hence also we may learn, that no repentance can remove this incapacity, but such as entirely changes the nature and disposition of the offender; which in the language of Scripture is called "being born again." Mere contrition for past crimes, nor even the pardon of them, cannot effect this, unless it operates to this entire conversion or new birth, as it is properly and emphatically named: for sorrow can no more purify a mind corrupted by a long continuance in vicious habits, than it can restore health to a body distempered by a long course of vice and intemperance. Hence also every one, who is in the least acquainted with himself, may judge of the reasonableness of the hope that is in him, and of his situation in a future state, by that of his present. If he feels in himself a temper proud, turbulent, vindictive, and malevolent, and a violent attachment to the pleasures or business of the world, he may be assured, that he must be excluded from the kingdom of heaven; not only because his conduct can merit no such reward, but because, if admitted, he would find there no objects satisfactory to his passions, inclinations, and pursuits, and therefore could only disturb the happiness of others, without enjoying any share of it himself.

Faith is another moral duty enjoined by this institution, of a species so new, that the philosophers of antiquity had no word expressive of this idea, nor any such idea to be expressed; for the word *πίστις*, or *fides*, which we translate faith, was never used by any pagan writer, in a sense the least similar to that, to which it is applied in the New Testament: where in general it signifies an humble, teachable, and candid disposition, a trust in God, and confidence in his promises; when applied particularly to Christianity, it means no more than a belief of this single proposition, that Christ was the Son of God; that is, in the language of those writings, the Messiah, who was foretold by the prophets, and expected by the Jews; who was sent by God into the world to preach righteousness, judgment, and everlasting life, and to die as an atonement for the sins of mankind. This was all that Christ required to be believed by those who were willing to become his disciples; he, who does not believe this, is not a Christian, and he who does, believes the whole that is essential to his profession, and all that is properly comprehended under the name of faith. This unfortunate word has indeed been so tortured and so misapplied to mean every absurdity, which artifice could impose upon ignorance, that it has lost all pretensions to the title of virtue; but if brought back to the simplicity of its original signification, it well deserves that name, because it usually arises from the most amiable

dispositions, and is always a direct contrast to pride, obstinacy, and self-conceit. If taken in the extensive sense of an assent to the evidence of things not seen, it comprehends the existence of a God, and a future state, and is therefore not only itself a moral virtue, but the source from whence all others must proceed; for on the belief of these all religion and morality must entirely depend. It cannot be altogether void of moral merit (as some will represent it,) because it is in a degree voluntary; for daily experience shows us, that men not only pretend to, but actually do believe, and disbelieve almost any propositions, which best suit their interests or inclinations, and unfeignedly change their sincere opinions with their situations and circumstances. For we have power over the mind's eye, as well as over the body's, to shut it against the strongest rays of truth and religion, whenever they become painful to us, and to open it again to the faint glimmerings of scepticism and infidelity when we "love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil." (John iii. 19.) And this, I think, sufficiently refutes all objections to the moral nature of faith, drawn from the supposition of its being quite involuntary, and necessarily dependent on the degree of evidence which is offered to our understandings.

Self-abasement is another moral duty inculcated by this religion only; which requires us to impute even our own virtues to the grace and favor of our Creator, and to acknowledge, that we can do nothing good by our own powers, unless assisted by his overruling influence. This doctrine seems at first sight to infringe on our free-will, and to deprive us of all merit; but, on a closer examination, the truth of it may be demonstrated both by reason and experience, and that in fact it doth not impair the one, or depreciate the other; and that it is productive of so much humility, resignation, and dependence on God, that it justly claims a place amongst the most illustrious moral virtues. Yet was this duty utterly repugnant to the proud and self-sufficient principles of the ancient philosophers as well as modern deists, and therefore before the publication of the Gospel totally unknown and uncomprehended.

Detachment from the world is another moral virtue constituted by his religion alone; so new, that even at this day few of its professors can be persuaded, that it is required, or that it is any virtue at all. By his detachment from the world is not to be understood a seclusion from society, abstraction from all business, or retirement to a gloomy cloister. Industry and labor, cheerfulness and hospitality are frequently recommended; nor is the acquisition of wealth and honors prohibited, if they can be obtained by honest means, and a moderate degree of attention and care; but such an unremitted anxiety and perpetual application as engrosses our whole time and thoughts, are forbid, because they are incompatible with the spirit of this religion, and must utterly disqualify us for the attainment of its great end. We toil on in the vain pursuits and frivolous occupations of the world, die in our harness, and then expect, if no gigantic crime stands in the way, to step immediately into the kingdom of heaven: but this is impossible! for without a previous detachment from the business of this world, we cannot be prepared for the happiness of another. Yet this could make no part of the morality of pagans, because their virtues were altogether connected with this business, and consisted chiefly in conducting it with honor to themselves, and benefit to the public. But Christianity has a nobler object in view,

which, if not attended to, must be lost forever. This object is that celestial mansion of which we should never lose sight, and to which we should be ever advancing during our journey through life; but this by no means precludes us from performing the business, or enjoying the amusements of travellers, provided they detain us not too long, or lead us too far out of our way.

It cannot be denied, that the great Author of the Christian institution first and singly ventured to oppose all the chief principles of Pagan virtue, and to introduce a religion directly opposite to those erroneous, though long-established, opinions, both in its duties and in its object. The most celebrated virtues of the ancients were high spirit, intrepid courage, and implacable resentment.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer, was the portrait of the most illustrious hero, drawn by one of the first poets of antiquity. To all these admired qualities, those of a true Christian are an exact contrast; for this religion constantly enjoins poorness of spirit, meekness, patience, and forgiveness of injuries. "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. v. 39.) The favorite characters among the Pagans were, the turbulent, ambitious, and intrepid, who through toils and dangers acquired wealth, and spent it in luxury, magnificence, and corruption; but both these are equally adverse to the Christian system, which forbids all extraordinary efforts to obtain wealth, care to secure, or thought concerning the enjoyment of it. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," &c. "Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek." (Matt. vi. 31.) The chief object of the Pagans was immortal fame; for this, their poets sang, their heroes fought, and their patriots died; and this was hung out by their philosophers and legislators as the great incitement to all noble and virtuous deeds. But what says the Christian legislator to his disciples on this subject? "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you for my sake; rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." (Matt. v. 11.) So widely different is the genius of the Pagan and Christian morality, that I will venture to affirm, that the most celebrated virtues of the former are more opposite to the spirit, and more inconsistent with the end of the latter, than even their most infamous vices; and that a Brutus, wrenching vengeance out of his hands to whom alone it belongs, by murdering the oppressor of his country, or a Cato, murdering himself from an impatience of control, leaves the world more unqualified for, and more inadmissible into the kingdom of heaven, than even a Messalina, or a Heliogabalus, with all their profligacy about them.

Nothing, I believe, has so much contributed to corrupt the true spirit of the Christian institution, as that partiality, which we contract from our earliest education for the manners of Pagan antiquity: from whence we learn to adopt every moral idea, which is repugnant to it; to applaud false virtues, which that disavows; to be guided by laws of honor, which that abhors; to imitate characters, which that detests; and to behold heroes, patriots, conquerors, and suicides with admiration, whose conduct that utterly condemns. From a coalition of these opposite principles was generated that monstrous system of cruelty and benevo-

lence, of barbarism and civility, of rapine and justice, of fighting and devotion, of revenge and generosity, which harassed the world for several centuries with crusades, holy wars, knight-errantry, and single combats, and even still retains influence enough, under the name of honor, to defeat the most beneficent ends of this holy institution. I mean not by this to pass any censure on the principles of valor, patriotism, or honor: they may be useful, and perhaps necessary, in the commerce and business of the present turbulent and imperfect state; and those who are actuated by them may be virtuous, honest, and even religious men: all that I assert is, that they cannot be Christians. A profligate may be a Christian, though a bad one, because he may be overpowered by passions and temptations, and his actions may contradict his principles; but a man, whose ruling principle is honor, however virtuous he may be, cannot be a Christian, because he erects a standard of duty, and deliberately adheres to it, diametrically opposite to the whole tenor of that religion.

The contrast between the Christian, and all other institutions religious or moral previous to its appearance, is sufficiently evident, and surely the superiority of the former is as little to be disputed; unless any one shall undertake to prove, that humility, patience, forgiveness, and benevolence are less amiable, and less beneficial qualities than pride, turbulence, revenge, and malignity: that the contempt of riches is less noble than their acquisition by fraud and villainy, or the distribution of them to the poor less commendable than avarice or profusion; or that a real immortality in the kingdom of heaven is an object less exalted, less rational, and less worthy of pursuit, than an imaginary immortality in the applause of men: that worthless tribute, which the folly of one part of mankind pays to the wickedness of the other; a tribute, which a wise man ought always to despise, because a good man can scarce ever obtain.

CONCLUSION.

If I mistake not, I have now fully established the truth of my three propositions:—

First, That there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new; both in its object, and its doctrines, not only superior to, but totally unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewise be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

Every one of these proposition, I am persuaded, is incontrovertibly true; and if true, this short but certain conclusion must inevitably follow; that such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men, much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons, who actually did discover and

publish it to the world ; and that therefore it must have been effected by the supernatural interposition of Divine power and wisdom ; that is, that it must derive its origin from God.

This argument seems to me little short of demonstration, and is indeed founded on the very same reasoning, by which the material world is proved to be the work of his invisible hand. We view with admiration the heavens and the earth, and all therein contained ; we contemplate with amazement the minute bodies of animals too small for perception, and the immense planetary orbs too vast for imagination. We are certain that these cannot be the works of man ; and therefore we conclude with reason, that they must be the productions of an Omnipotent Creator. In the same manner we see here a scheme of religion and morality unlike and superior to all ideas of the human mind, equally impossible to have been discovered by the knowledge, as invented by the artifice of man ; and therefore by the very same mode of reasoning, and with the same justice, we conclude, that it must derive its origin from the same Omnipotent and Omniscient Being.

Nor was the propagation of this religion less extraordinary than the religion itself, or less above the reach of all human power, than the discovery of it was above that of all human understanding. It is well known, that in the course of a very few years it was spread over all the principal parts of Asia and of Europe, and this by the ministry only of an inconsiderable number of the most inconsiderable persons ; that at this time Paganism was in the highest repute, believed universally by the vulgar, and patronized by the great ; that the wisest men of the wisest nations assisted at its sacrifices, and consulted its oracles on the most important occasions. Whether these were the tricks of the priests or of the devil, is of no consequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be converted, or overcome ; the fact is certain, that, on the preaching of a few fishermen, their altars were deserted, and their deities were dumb. This miracle they undoubtedly performed, whatever we may think of the rest : and this is surely sufficient to prove the authority of their commission ; and to convince us, that neither their undertaking nor the execution of it could possibly be their own.

How much this Divine institution has been corrupted, or how soon these corruptions began, how far it has been discolored by the false notions of illiterate ages, or blended with fictions by pious frauds, or how early these notions and fictions were introduced, no learning or sagacity is now able precisely to ascertain ; but surely no man, who seriously considers the excellence and novelty of its doctrines, the manner in which it was at first propagated through the world, the persons who achieved that wonderful work, and the originality of those writings in which it is still recorded, can possibly believe, that it could ever have been the production of imposture or chance ; or that from an imposture the most wicked and blasphemous (for if an imposture, such it is) all the religion and virtue now existing on earth can derive their source.

But, notwithstanding what has been here urged, if any man can believe that at a time when the literature of Greece and Rome, then in their meridian lustre, were insufficient for the task, the son of a carpenter, with twelve of the meanest and most illiterate mechanics, his associates, unassisted by any supernatural power, should be able to discover or invent a system of theology the most sublime, and of ethics the most per-

fect, which had escaped the penetration and learning of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero ; and that from this system, by their own sagacity, they had excluded every false virtue, though universally admired, and admitted every true virtue, though despised and ridiculed by all the rest of the world ;—if any one can believe that these men could become impostors, for no other purpose than the propagation of truth, villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs without the least prospect of honor or advantage ; or that, if all this should have been possible, these few inconsiderable persons should have been able, in the course of a few years, to have spread this their religion over most parts of the then known world, in opposition to the interests, pleasures, ambition, prejudices, and even reason of mankind ; to have triumphed over the power of princes, the intrigues of states, the force of custom, the blindness of zeal, the influence of priests, the arguments of orators, and the philosophy of the world, without any supernatural assistance ;—if any one can believe all these miraculous events, contradictory to the experience of the powers and dispositions of human nature, he must be possessed of much more faith than is necessary to make him a Christian, and remain an unbeliever from mere credulity.

But should these credulous infidels after all be in the right, and this pretended revelation be all a fable ; from believing it what harm could ensue ? Would it render princes more tyrannical, or subjects more ungovernable ? the rich more insolent, or the poor more disorderly ? Would it make worse parents or children, husbands or wives, masters or servants, friends or neighbors ? Or would it not make men more virtuous, and consequently more happy in every situation ? It could not be criminal ; it could not be detrimental. It could not be criminal, because it cannot be a crime to assent to such evidence, as has been able to convince the best and wisest of mankind ; by which, if false, Providence must have permitted men to deceive each other, for the most beneficial ends, and which therefore it would be surely more meritorious to believe, from a disposition of faith and charity, which believeth all things, than to reject with scorn from obstinacy and self-conceit. It cannot be detrimental, because, if Christianity is a fable, it is a fable, the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a steady and uniform course of virtue, piety, and devotion, or can support them in the hour of distress, of sickness, and of death. Whatever might be the operations of true deism on the minds of Pagan philosophers, that can now avail us nothing ; for that light, which once lightened the Gentiles is now absorbed in the brighter illumination of the Gospel ; we can now form no rational system of deism, but what must be borrowed from that source, and, as far as it reaches towards perfection, must be exactly the same ; and therefore, if we will not accept of Christianity, we will have no religion at all. Accordingly we see, that those who fly from this, scarce ever stop at deism ; but hasten on with great alacrity to a total rejection of all religious and moral principles whatever.

If I have here demonstrated the Divine origin of the Christian religion by an argument which cannot be confuted ; no others, however plausible or numerous, founded on probabilities, doubts, and conjectures, can ever disprove it, because, if it is once shown to be true, it cannot be false. But as many arguments of this kind have bewildered some candid and ingenuous minds, I shall here bestow a few lines on those

which have the most weight, in order to wipe out, or at least to diminish their perplexing influence.

But here I must previously observe, that the most insurmountable, as well as the most usual obstacle to our belief, arises from our passions, appetites, and interests; for faith being an act of the will as much as of the understanding, we oftener disbelieve for want of inclination, than want of evidence. The first step towards thinking this revelation true, is our hope that it is so; for whenever we much wish any proposition to be true, we are not far from believing it. It is certainly for the interest of all good men, that its authority should be well-founded; and still more beneficial to the bad, if ever they intend to be better; because it is the only system, either of reason or religion, which can give them any assurance of pardon. The punishment of vice is a debt due to justice, which cannot be remitted without compensation: repentance can be no compensation; it may change a wicked man's disposition, and prevent his offending for the future, but can lay no claim to pardon for what is past. If any one, by profligacy and extravagance, contracts a debt, repentance may make him wiser, and hinder him from running into further distresses, but can never pay off his old bonds; for which he must be ever accountable, unless they are discharged by himself, or some other in his stead; this very discharge Christianity alone holds forth on our repentance, and, if true, will certainly perform: the truth of it therefore must ardently be wished for by all, except the wicked, who are determined neither to repent nor reform. It is well worth every man's while, who either is, or intends to be virtuous, to believe Christianity, if he can: because he will find it the surest preservative against all vicious habits and their attendant evils, the best resource under distresses and disappointments, ill health and ill-fortune, and the firmest basis on which contemplation can rest; and without some, the human mind is never perfectly at ease. But if any one is attached to a favorite pleasure, or eagerly engaged in worldly pursuits incompatible with the precepts of this religion, and he believes it, he must either relinquish those pursuits with uneasiness, or persist in them with remorse and dissatisfaction, and therefore must commence unbeliever in his own defence. With such I shall not dispute, nor pretend to persuade men by arguments to make themselves miserable: but to those, who, not afraid that this religion may be true, are really affected by such objections, I will offer the following answers, which, though short, will, I doubt not, be sufficient to show them their weakness and futility.

In the first place, then, some have been so bold as to strike at the root of all revelation from God, by asserting, that it is incredible, because unnecessary, and unnecessary, because the reason which he has bestowed on mankind is sufficiently able to discover all the religious and moral duties which he requires of them, if they would but attend to her precepts, and be guided by her friendly admonitions. Mankind have undoubtedly, at various times from the remotest ages, received so much knowledge by Divine communications, and have ever been so much inclined to impute it all to their own sufficiency, that it is now difficult to determine what human reason unassisted can effect. But to form a true judgment on this subject, let us turn our eyes to those remote regions of the globe, to which this supernatural assistance has never yet extended, and we shall there see men, endued with sense and reason

not inferior to our own, so far from being capable of forming systems of religion and morality, that they are at this day totally unable to make a nail or a hatchet ; from whence we may surely be convinced, that reason alone is so far from being sufficient to offer to mankind a perfect religion, that it has never yet been able to lead them to any degree of culture or civilization whatever. These have uniformly flowed from that great fountain of Divine communication opened in the East, in the earliest ages, and thence been gradually diffused in salubrious streams, throughout the various regions of the earth. Their rise and progress, by surveying the history of the world, may easily be traced backwards to their source ; and wherever these have not as yet been able to penetrate, we there find the human species not only void of all true religious and moral sentiments, but not the least emerged from their original ignorance and barbarity ; which seems a demonstration, that although human reason is capable of progression in science, yet the first foundations must be laid by supernatural instructions ; for surely no other probable cause can be assigned why one part of mankind should have made such an amazing progress in religious, moral, metaphysical, and philosophical inquiries ; such wonderful improvements in policy, legislation, commerce, and manufactures, while the other part, formed with the same natural capacities, and divided only by seas and mountains, should remain, during the same number of ages, in a state little superior to brutes, without government, without laws or letters, and even without clothes and habitations ; murdering each other to satiate their revenge, and devouring each other to appease their hunger. I say no cause can be assigned for this amazing difference, except that the first have received information from those Divine communications recorded in the Scriptures, and the latter have never yet been favored with such assistance. This remarkable contrast seems an unanswerable, though, perhaps, a new proof of the necessity of revelation, and a solid refutation of all arguments against it, drawn from the sufficiency of human reason. And as reason in her natural state is thus incapable of making any progress in knowledge ; so when furnished with materials by supernatural aid, if left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations, she falls into more numerous, and more gross errors, than her own native ignorance could ever have suggested. There is then no absurdity so extravagant, which she is not ready to adopt ; she has persuaded some, that there is no God ; others, that there can be no future state : she has taught some, that there is no difference between vice and virtue, and that to cut a man's throat and to relieve his necessities, are actions equally meritorious : she has convinced many, that they have no free-will, in opposition to their own experience ; some, that there can be no such thing as soul, or spirit, contrary to their own perceptions ; and others, no such thing as matter, or body, in contradiction to their senses. By analyzing all things she can show, that there is nothing in any thing ; by perpetual lifting she can reduce all existence to the invisible dust of scepticism ; and, by recurring to first principles, prove, to the satisfaction of her followers, that there are no principles at all. How far such a guide is to be depended on in the important concerns of religion and morals, I leave to the judgment of every considerate man to determine. This is certain, that human reason in its highest state of cultivation, amongst the philosophers of Greece and Rome, was never able to form a religion

comparable to Christianity; nor have have all those sources of moral virtue, such as truth, beauty, and the fitness of things, which modern philosophers have endeavored to substitute in its stead ever been effectual to produce good men, and have themselves often been the productions of some of the worst.

Others there are, who allow, that a revelation from God may be both necessary, and credible; but alledge, that the Scriptures, that is the books of the Old and New Testament, cannot be that revelation; because in them are to be found errors and inconsistencies, fabulous stories, false facts, and false philosophy: which can never be derived from the fountain of all wisdom and truth. To this I reply, that I readily acknowledge, that the Scriptures are not revelations from God, but the history of them: the revelation itself is derived from God; but the history of it is the production of men, and therefore the truth of it is not in the least affected by their fallibility, but depends on the internal evidence of its own supernatural excellence. If in these books such a religion, as has been here described, actually exists, no seeming, or even real defects found in them can disprove the Divine origin of this religion, or invalidate my argument. Let us, for instance, grant, that the Mosaic history of the creation was founded on the erroneous but popular principles of those early ages; who imagined the earth to be a vast plain, and the celestial bodies no more than luminaries hung up in the concave firmament to enlighten it; will it from thence follow, that Moses could not be a proper instrument in the hands of Providence, to impart to the Jews a Divine law, because he was not inspired with a foreknowledge of the Copernican and Newtonian systems? or that Christ must be an impostor, because Moses was not an astronomer? Let us also suppose, that the accounts of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, the devil's taking refuge in the herd of swine, with several other narrations in the New Testament, frequently ridiculed by unbelievers, were all but stories accommodated to the ignorance and superstitions of the times and countries in which they were written, or pious frauds, intended to impress on vulgar minds a higher reverence of the power and sanctity of Christ; will this in the least impeach the excellence of his religion, or the authority of its founder? or is Christianity answerable for all the fables of which it may have been the innocent occasion? The want of this obvious distinction has much injured the Christian cause; because on this ground it has ever been most successfully attacked, and on this ground it is not easily to be defended: for if the records of this revelation are supposed to be the revelation itself, the least defect discovered in them must be fatal to the whole. What has led many to overlook this distinction is that common phrase that, the Scriptures are the word of God; and in one sense they certainly are; that is, they are the sacred repository of all the revelations, dispensations, promises, and precepts which God has vouchsafed to communicate to mankind; but by this expression we are not to understand that every part of this voluminous collection of historical, poetical, prophetic, theological, and moral writings, which we call the Bible, was dictated by the immediate influence of Divine inspiration: the authors of these books pretended to no such infallibility; and if they claim it not for themselves, who has authority to claim it for them? Christ required no such belief from those who were willing to be his disciples.

says, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." (John vi. 47); where does he say, He that believeth not every word contained in Old Testament, which was then extant, or every word of the New Testament which was to be wrote for the instruction of future generations, hath not everlasting life? There are innumerable occurrences mentioned in the Scriptures, some of greater, some of less, some of no importance at all; the truth of which we can have no reason to question, the belief of them is surely not essential to the faith of a Christian: we no doubt but that St. Paul was shipwrecked, and that he left his books and parchments at Troas; but the belief of these facts makes no part of Christianity, nor is the truth of them any proof of its author-

It proves only that this apostle could not in common life be under perpetual influence of infallible inspiration; for, had he been so, he would not have put to sea before a storm, nor have forgot his cloak. These writers were undoubtedly directed by supernatural influence in things necessary to the great work, which they were appointed to perform. At particular times, and on particular occasions, they were enabled to utter prophecies, to speak languages, and to work miracles; in all other circumstances, they seem to have been left to the direction of their own understandings like other men. In the sciences of history, geography, astronomy, and philosophy, they appear to have been no better instructed than others, and therefore were not less liable to be misled by the errors and prejudices of the times and countries in which they lived. They related facts like honest men, to the best of their knowledge or information, and they recorded the divine lessons of their master with the utmost fidelity; but they pretended to no infallibility, for they sometimes differed in their relations, and they sometimes disagreed in their sentiments. All which proves only, that they did not act, or write in a combination to deceive, but not in the least intention, the truth of the revelation which they published; which depends not on any external evidence whatever. For I will venture to maintain, that if any one could prove, what is impossible to be proved, that it is not true, that there are errors in geography, chronology, philosophy, in every page of the Bible; that the prophecies therein recorded are all but fortunate guesses, or artful applications, and the miracles there recorded no better than legendary tales; if any one could prove, that these books were never written by their pretended authors, that they were posterior impositions on illiterate and credulous ages: all these wonderful discoveries would prove no more than this, that God, for reasons to us unknown, has thought proper to permit a revelation to be communicated to mankind to be mixed with their ignorance, and corrupted by their frauds from its earliest infancy, in the same manner which he has visibly permitted it to be mixed and corrupted from the first period to the present hour. If in these books a religion superior to human imagination actually exists, it is of no consequence to the truth of its Divine origin, by what means it was there introduced, or how much it is mixed with what human errors and imperfections it is blended. A diamond, though found in a bed of mud, is still a diamond, nor can the dirt, which surrounds it, depreciate its value or destroy its lustre.

To some speculative and refined observers it has appeared incredible, that a wise and benevolent Creator should have constituted a world upon one plan, and a religion for it on another; that is, that he should have

revealed a religion to mankind, which not only contradicts the principal passions and inclinations which he has implanted in their natures, but is incompatible with the whole economy of that world which he has created, and in which he has thought proper to place them. This, say they, with regard to the Christian is apparently the case: the love of power, riches, honor, and fame, are the great incitements to generous and magnanimous actions; yet by this institution are all these depreciated and discouraged. Government esential to the nature of man, and cannot be managed without certain degrees of violence, corruption, and imposition; yet are all these strictly forbid. Nations cannot subsist without wars, nor war be carried on without rapine, desolation, and murder; yet are these prohibited under the severest threats. The nonresistance of evil must subject individuals to continual oppressions, and leave nations a defenceless prey to their enemies; yet is this recommended. Perpetual patience under insults and injuries must every day provoke new insults and new injuries; yet is this enjoined. A neglect of all we eat and drink and wear, must put an end to all commerce, manufactures, and industry; yet is this required. In short, were these precepts universally obeyed, the disposition of all human affairs must be entirely changed, and the business of the world, constituted as it now is, could not go on. To all this I answer, that such indeed is the Christian revelation, though some its advocates may perhaps be unwilling to own it, and such it is constantly declared to be by him who gave it, as well as by those, who published it under his immediate direction: to these he says, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John xv. 19. To the Jews he declares, "Ye are of this world; I am not of this world," (John viii. 23.) St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Be not conformed to this world," (Rom. xii. 2); and to the Corinthians, "We speak not the wisdom of this world," (Cor. ii. 6.) St. James says, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (Jam. iv. 4.) This irreconcilable disagreement between Christianity and the world is announced in numberless other places in the New Testament, and indeed by the whole tenor of those writings. These are plain declarations, which, in spite of all the evasions of those good managers, who choose to take a little of this world in their way to heaven, stand fixed and immovable against all their arguments drawn from public benefit and pretended necessity, and must ever forbid any reconciliation between the pursuits of this world and the Christian institution: but they, who reject it on this account, enter not into the sublime spirit of this religion, which is not a code of precise laws designed for the well ordering society, adapted to the ends of worldly convenience, and amenable to the tribunal of human prudence; but a Divine lesson of purity and perfection, so far superior to the low considerations of conquest, government, and commerce, that it takes no more notice of them than of the battles of game-cocks, the policy of bees, or the industry of ants: they recollect not what is the first and principal object of this institution; that is not, as has been often repeated, to make us happy, or even virtuous in the present life, for the sake of augmenting our hapiness here, but to conduct us through a state of dangers and sufferings, of sin and temptation, in such a manner as

qualify us for the enjoyment of happiness hereafter. All other institutions of religion and morals were made for the world, but the characteristic of this is to be against it; and therefore the merits of Christian doctrines are not to be weighed in the scales of public utility, like those of moral precepts, because worldly utility is not their end. If Christ and his apostles had pretended, that the religion which they preached would advance the power, wealth, and prosperity of nations, of men, they would have deserved but little credit; but they constantly profess the contrary, and every where declare, that their religion is adverse to the world, and all its pursuits. Christ says, speaking of his disciples, "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world." (John xvii. 16.) It can therefore be no imputation on this religion, or on any of its precepts, that they tend not to an end which its author professedly disclaims: nor can it surely be deemed a defect, that it is adverse to the vain pursuits of this world; for so are reason, wisdom and experience; they all teach us the same lesson, they demonstrate to us every day, that these are begun on false hopes, and end in disappointment. This professed incompatibility with the little, wretched, and iniquitous business of the world, is therefore so far from being a defect in this religion, that, was there no other proof of its Divine origin, this alone, I think, would be instantly sufficient. The great plan and benevolent design of this dispensation is plainly this; to enlighten the minds, purify the religion, and amend the morals of mankind in general, and to select the most virtuous of them to be successively transplanted into the kingdom of heaven: which gracious offer is impartially tendered to all, who by perseverance in meekness, patience, piety, charity, and a detachment from the world, are willing to qualify themselves for this holy and happy society. Was this universally accepted, and did every man serve strictly every precept of the Gospel, the face of human affairs and the economy of the world would indeed be greatly changed; but surely they would be changed for the better; and we should enjoy much more happiness, even here, than at present: for we must not forget, that evils are by it forbid as well as resistance; injuries as well as revenge; all unwillingness to diffuse the enjoyments of life, as well as solicitude to acquire them; all obstacles to ambition, as well as ambition itself; and therefore all contentions for power and interest would at an end; and the world would go on much more happily than it now does. But this universal acceptance of such an offer was never expected from so depraved and imperfect a creature as man, and therefore could never have been any part of the design: for it was foretold and foretold by him who made it, that few, very few would accept it on these terms. He says, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it," (Matt. x. 14.) Accordingly we see, that very few are prevailed on by the prospect of future happiness, to relinquish the pursuit of present pleasures and interests, and therefore these pursuits are little interrupted by the possession of so inconsiderable a number. As the natural world subsists in the struggles of the same elements, so does the moral by the contentions of the same passions, as from the beginning. The generality of mankind are actuated by the same motives; fight, scuffle, and scramble for power, riches, and pleasures with the same eagerness:

all occupations and professions are exercised with the same alacrity, and there are soldiers, lawyers, statesmen, patriots, and politicians, just as if Christianity had never existed. Thus, we see this wonderful dispensation has answered all the purposes for which it was intended: it has enlightened the minds, purified the religion, and amended the morals of mankind; and, without subverting the constitution, policy, or business of the world, opened a gate, though a strait one, through which all, who are wise enough to choose it, and good enough to be fit for it, may find an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Others have said, that if this revelation had really been from God, his infinite power and goodness could never have suffered it to have been so soon perverted from its original purity, to have continued in a state of corruption through the course of so many ages, and at last to have proved so ineffectual to the reformation of mankind. To these I answer, that all this, on examination, will be found inevitable, from the nature of all revelations communicated to so imperfect a creature as man, and from circumstances peculiar to the rise and progress of the Christian religion in particular: for when this was first preached to the Gentile nations, though they were not able to withstand the force of its evidence, and therefore received it; yet they could not be prevailed on to relinquish their old superstitions, and former opinions, but chose rather to incorporate them with it; by which means it was necessarily mixed with their ignorance, and their learning; by both which it was equally injured. The people defaced its worship by blending it with their idolatrous ceremonies, and the philosophers corrupted its doctrines by weaving them up with the notions of the Gnostics, Mystics, and Manichæans, the prevailing systems of those times. By degrees its irresistible excellence gained over princes, potentates, and conquerors to its interests, and it was supported by their patronage: but that patronage soon engaged it in their policies and contests, and destroyed that excellence by which it had been acquired. At length the meek and humble professors of the Gospel enslaved these princes, and conquered these conquerors, their patrons, and erected for themselves such a stupendous fabric of wealth and power, as the world had never seen: they then propagated their religion by the same methods by which it had been persecuted; nations were converted by fire and sword, and the vanquished were baptised with daggers at their throats. All these events we see proceed from a chain of causes and consequences, which could not have been broken without changing the established course of things by a constant series of miracles, or a total alteration of human nature: whilst that continues as it is, the purest religion must be corrupted by a conjunction with power and riches, and it will also then appear to be much more corrupted than it really is: because many are inclined to think, that every deviation from its primitive state is a corruption: Christianity was at first preached by the poor and mean, in holes and caverns, under the iron rod of persecution; and therefore many absurdly conclude, that any degree of wealth or power in its ministers, or of magnificence in its worship, are corruptions inconsistent with the genuine simplicity of its original state; they are offended, that modern bishops should possess titles, palaces, revenues, and coaches, when it is known, that their predecessors, the apostles, were despicable wanderers without houses or money, and walked on foot. The apostles in-

deed lived in a state of poverty and persecution attendant on their particular situation, and the work which they had undertaken : this was their misfortune, but no part of their religion, and therefore it can be no more incumbent on their successors to imitate their poverty and meanness, than to be whipped, imprisoned, and put to death, in compliance with their example. These are all but the suggestions of envy and malevolence, but no objections to these fortunate alterations in Christianity and its professors ; which, if not abused to the purposes of tyranny and superstition, are in fact no more than the necessary and proper effects of its more prosperous situation. When a poor man grows rich, or a servant becomes a master, they should take care that their exaltation prompts them not to be unjust or insolent ; but surely it is not requisite or right, that their behavior and mode of living should be exactly the same, when their situation is altered. How far this institution has been effectual to the reformation of mankind, it is not easy now to ascertain, because the enormities which prevailed before the appearance of it are by time so far removed from our sight, that they are scarcely visible ; but those of the most gigantic size still remain in the records of history, as monuments of the rest. Wars in those ages were carried on with a ferocity and cruelty unknown to the present : whole cities and nations were extirpated by fire and sword ; and thousands of the vanquished were crucified and impaled for having endeavored only to defend themselves and their country. The lives of newborn infants were then entirely at the disposal of their parents, who were at liberty to bring them up, or expose them to perish by cold and hunger, or to be devoured by birds and beasts ; and this was frequently practised without punishment, and even without censure. Gladiators were employed by hundreds to cut one another to pieces in public theatres for the diversion of the most polite assemblies ; and though these combatants at first consisted of criminals only, by degrees men of the highest rank, and even ladies of the most illustrious families, enrolled themselves in this honorable list. On many occasions human sacrifices were ordained ; and at the funerals of rich and eminent persons, great numbers of the slaves were murdered as victims pleasing to their departed spirits. The most infamous obscenities were made part of their religious worship, and the most unnatural lusts publicly avowed and celebrated, by their most admired poets. At the approach of Christianity all these horrid abominations vanished ; and amongst those who first embraced it, scarce a single vice was to be found. To such an amazing degree of piety, charity, temperance, patience, and resignation were the primitive converts exalted, that they seem literally to have been regenerated, and purified from all the imperfections of human nature ; and to have pursued such a constant and uniform course of devotion, innocence, and virtue, as, in the present times, it is almost as difficult for us to conceive as to imitate. If it is asked, why should not the belief of the same religion now produce the same effects ? The answer is short, because it is not believed. The most sovereign medicine can perform no cure, if the patient will not be persuaded to take it. Yet, notwithstanding all impediments, it has certainly done a great deal towards diminishing the vices, and correcting the dispositions of mankind ; and was it universally adopted in belief and practice, would totally eradicate both sin and punishment. But this was never expected,

or designed, or possible, because, if their existence did not arise from some necessity to us unknown, they never would have been permitted to exist at all, and, therefore, they can no more be extirpated, than they could have been prevented. For this would certainly be incompatible with the frame and constitution of this world, and in all probability, with that of another. And this, I think, well accounts for that reserve and obscurity with which this religion was at first promulgated, and that want of irresistible evidence of its truth, by which it might possibly have been enforced. Christ says to his disciples, "To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables; that seeing them may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." (Mark iv. 11, 12.) That is, to you by peculiar favor it is given to know and understand the doctrines of my religion, and by that means to qualify yourselves for the kingdom of heaven; but to the multitude without, that is to all mankind in general, this indulgence cannot be extended: because that all men should be exempted from sin and punishment is utterly repugnant to the universal system, and that constitution of things, which Infinite Wisdom has thought proper to adopt.

Objections have likewise been raised to the Divine authority of this religion from the incredibility of some of its doctrines, particularly of those concerning the Trinity, and atonement for sin by the sufferings and death of Christ; the one contradicting all the principles of human reason, and the other all our ideas of Divine justice. To these objections I shall only say, that no arguments, founded on principles which we cannot comprehend, can possibly disprove a proposition already proved on principles which we do understand; and, therefore, that on this subject they ought not to be attended to. That three Beings should be one Being, is a proposition which certainly contradicts reason, that is, *our* reason, but it does not from thence follow, that it cannot be true; for there are many propositions which contradict our reason, and yet are demonstrably true. One is the very first principle of all religion, the being of a God; for that any thing should exist without a cause, or that any thing should be the cause of its own existence, are propositions equally contradictory to our reason; yet one of them must be true, or nothing could ever have existed. In like manner the overruling grace of the Creator, and the free-will of his creatures, his certain foreknowledge of future events, and the uncertain contingency of those events, are to our apprehensions, absolute contradictions to each other; and yet the truth of every one of these is demonstrable from Scripture, reason, and experience. All these difficulties arise from our imagining, that the mode of existence of all beings must be similar to our own; that is, that they must all exist in time and space; and hence proceeds our embarrassment on this subject. We know that no two beings, with whose mode of existence we are acquainted, can exist in the same point of time in the same point of space, and that therefore they cannot be one; but how far beings, whose mode of existence bears no relation to time or space, may be united, we cannot comprehend: and therefore the possibility of such a union we cannot positively deny. In like manner our reason informs us, that the punishment of the innocent, instead of the guilty, is diametrically opposite to justice, rectitude, and all pretensions to utility; but we should

o remember, that the short line of our reason cannot reach to the bottom of this question : it cannot inform us by what means either guilt or punishment ever gained a place in the works of a Creator infinitely good and powerful, whose goodness must have induced him, and whose power must have enabled him to exclude them. It cannot assure us, that some sufferings of individuals are not necessary to the happiness and well-being of the whole. It cannot convince us, that they do not actually arise from this necessity, or that, for this cause, they may not be required of, and levied like a tax for the public benefit ; or that this tax may not be paid by one being, as well as another ; and, therefore, if voluntarily suffered, be justly accepted from the innocent instead of the guilty. Of these circumstances we are totally ignorant ; nor can our reason afford us any information, and, therefore, we are not able to assert, that such a measure is contrary to justice, or void of utility. For, unless we should first resolve that great question, whence came evil ? we can decide nothing on the dispensations of Providence ; because they must necessarily be connected with that undiscoverable principle ; and, as we know not the root of the disease, we cannot judge of what is, or is not, a proper and effectual remedy. It is remarkable, that, notwithstanding the seeming absurdities of this doctrine, there is one circumstance in its favor ; which is, that it has been universally adopted in all ages, as far as history can carry us back in our inquiries to the earliest times ; in which we find all nations, civilized and barbarous, however differing in all other religious opinions, agreeing alone in the expediency of appeasing their offended deities by sacrifices, that is, by the vicarious sufferings of men or other animals. This notion could never have been derived from reason, because it directly contradicts it ; nor from ignorance, because ignorance could never have contrived so unaccountable an expedient, nor have been uniform in all ages and countries in any opinion whatsoever ; nor from the artifice of kings or priests, in order to acquire dominion over the people, because it seems not adapted to that end, and we find it implanted in the minds of the most remote savages this day discovered, who have neither kings nor priests, artifice nor dominion amongst them. It must, therefore, be derived from natural instinct, or supernatural revelation, both which are equally the operations of divine power. It may be further urged, that however true these doctrines may be, yet it must be inconsistent with the justice and goodness of the Creator to require from his creatures the belief of propositions which contradict, or are above the reach of that reason, which he has thought proper to bestow upon them. To this I answer, that genuine Christianity requires no such belief. It has discovered to us many important truths, with which we were before entirely unacquainted ; and amongst them are these, that three Beings are somehow united in the divine essence and that God will accept of the suffering of Christ as an atonement for the sins of mankind. These, considered as declarations of facts only, neither contradict, nor are above the reach of human reason. The first is a proposition as plain, as that three equilateral lines compose one triangle ; the other is as intelligible, as that one man should charge the debts of another. In what manner this union is formed, why God accepts these vicarious punishments, or to what purposes they may be subservient, it informs us not, because no information could enable us to comprehend these mysteries, and therefore it does not re-

quire that we should know or believe any thing about them. The truth of these doctrines must rest entirely on the authority of those who taught them; but then we should reflect, that those who were the same persons who taught us a system of religion more sublime, and of ethics more perfect, than any which our faculties were ever able to discover; but which, when discovered, are exactly consonant to our reason; and that, therefore, we should not hastily reject those informations which they have vouchsafed to give us, of which our reason is not a competent judge. If an able mathematician proves to us the truth of several propositions, by demonstrations which we understand, we hesitate not on his authority to assent to others, the process of whose proofs we are not able to follow; why, therefore, should we refuse that credit to Christ and his apostles, which we think reasonable to give to one another?

Many have objected to the whole scheme of this revelation as partial, fluctuating, indeterminate, unjust, and unworthy of an omniscient and omnipotent author, who cannot be supposed to have favored particular persons, countries, and times, with this Divine communication, while others, no less meritorious, have been altogether excluded from its benefits; nor to have changed and counteracted his own designs; that is, to have formed mankind able and disposed to render themselves miserable by their own wickedness, and then to have contrived so strange an expedient to restore them to that happiness, which they need never have been permitted to forfeit; and this to be brought about by the unnecessary interposition of a mediator. To all this I shall only say, that however unaccountable this may appear to us, who see but as small a part of the Christian as of the universal plan of creation, they are both in regard to all these circumstances exactly analogous to each other. In all the dispensations of Providence, with which we are acquainted, benefits are distributed in a similar manner; health and strength, sense and science, wealth and power, are all bestowed on individuals and communities in different degrees and at different times. The whole economy of this world consists of evils and remedies; and these for the most part, administered by the instrumentality of intermediate agents. God has permitted us to plunge ourselves into poverty, distress, and misery, by our own vices, and has afforded us the advice, instructions, and examples of others, to deter or extricate us from these calamities. He has formed us subject to innumerable diseases, and he has bestowed on us a variety of remedies. He has made us liable to hunger, thirst, and nakedness, and he supplies us with food, drink, and clothing, usually by the administration of others. He has created poisons, and he has provided antidotes. He has ordained the winter's cold to cure the pestilential heats of the summer, and the summer's sunshine to dry up the inundations of the winter. Why the constitution of nature is so formed, why all the visible dispensations of Providence are such, and why such is the Christian dispensation also, we know not, nor have faculties to comprehend. God might certainly have made the material world a system of perfect beauty and regularity, without evils, and without remedies; and the Christian dispensation a scheme only of moral virtue, productive of happiness, without the intervention of any atonement or mediation. He might have exempted our bodies from all diseases, and our minds from all depravity, and we should then have stood in no need of medicines to restore us to health, or expedients to reconcile us to his favor.

seems indeed to our ignorance, that this would have been more consistent with justice and reason; but his infinite wisdom has decided in other manner, and formed the systems, both of nature and Christianity, on other principles, and these so exactly similar, that we have use to conclude, that they both must proceed from the same source of divine power and wisdom, however inconsistent with our reason they may appear. Reason is undoubtedly our surest guide in all matters, which within the narrow circle of her intelligence. On the subject of revelation her province is only to examine into its authority, and when that once proved, she has no more to do, but to acquiesce in its doctrines, and, therefore, is never so ill employed, as when she pretends to accommodate them to her own ideas of rectitude and truth. God, says this self-sufficient teacher, is perfectly wise just and good; and what is the inference? That all his dispensations must be conformable to our notions of perfect wisdom, justice, and goodness; but it should first be proved, that man is as perfect and as wise as his Creator, or this consequence will by no means follow; but rather the reverse, that is, that the dispensations of a perfect and all-wise Being must probably appear unreasonable, and perhaps unjust, to a being imperfect and ignorant; and, therefore, their seeming impossibility may be a mark of their truth, and, in some measure, justify that pious rant of a mad enthusiast, "Credo, quia impossibile." Nor is it the least surprising, that we are not able to understand the spiritual dispensations of the Almighty, when his material works are to us no less incomprehensible. Our reason can afford us no sight into those great properties of matter, gravitation, attraction, elasticity, and electricity, nor even into the essence of matter itself. Can reason teach us how the sun's luminous orb can fill a circle, whose diameter contains many millions of miles, with a constant inundation of excessive rays during thousands of years, without any perceivable diminution of that body from whence they are continually poured, or any augmentation of those bodies on which they fall, and by which they are constantly absorbed? Can reason tell us how those rays, darted with a velocity greater than that of a cannon ball, can strike the tenderest organs of the human frame without inflicting any degree of pain, or what means this percussion only can convey the forms of distant objects to an immaterial mind? or how any union can be formed between material and immaterial essences? or how the wounds of the body can give pain to the soul, or the anxiety of the soul can emaciate and destroy the body? That all these things are so, we have visible and indisputable demonstration; but how they can be so, is to us as incomprehensible as the most abstruse mysteries of revelation can possibly be. In short, we see so small a part of the great whole, we know so little of the relation, which the present life bears to pre-existent and future states; we conceive so little of the nature of God, and his attributes, or mode of existence; we can comprehend so little of the material, and so much less of the moral plan on which the universe is constituted, or on what principle it proceeds, that, if a revelation from such a Being, on such subjects as in every part familiar to our understandings, and consonant to our reason, we should have great cause to suspect its Divine authority; and

therefore, had this revelation been less incomprehensible, it would certainly have been more incredible.

But I shall not enter farther into the consideration of these abstruse and difficult speculations, because the discussion of them would render this short essay too tedious and laborious a task for the perusal of them, for whom it was principally intended; which are all those busy or idle persons, whose time and thoughts are wholly engrossed by the pursuits of business or pleasure, ambition or luxury, who know nothing of this religion, except what they have accidentally picked up by desultory conversation, or superficial reading, and have thence determined with themselves, that a pretended revelation, founded on so strange and improbable a story, so contradictory to reason, so adverse to the world and all its occupations, so incredible in its doctrines, and in its precepts so impracticable, can be nothing more than the imposition of priestcraft upon ignorant and illiterate ages, and artfully continued as an engine well adapted to awe and govern the superstitious vulgar. To talk to such about the Christian religion is to converse with the deaf concerning music, or with the blind on the beauties of painting. They want all ideas relative to the subject, and, therefore, can never be made to comprehend it. To enable them to do this, their minds must be formed for these conceptions by contemplation, retirement, and abstraction from business and dissipation; by ill-health, disappointments, and distresses; and possibly by Divine interposition, or by enthusiasm, which is usually mistaken for it. Without some of these preparatory aids, together with a competent degree of learning and application, it is impossible that they can think or know, understand or believe, any thing about it. If they profess to believe, they deceive others; if they fancy that they believe, they deceive themselves. I am ready to acknowledge, that these gentlemen, as far as their information reaches, are perfectly in the right; and if they are endued with good understandings, which have been entirely devoted to the business or amusements of the world, they can pass no other judgment, and must revolt from the history and doctrines of this religion. "The preaching Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," (1 Cor. i. 23;) and so it must appear to all, who, like them, judge from established prejudices, false learning, and superficial knowledge; for those who are quite unable to follow the chain of its prophecy, to see the beauty and justness of its moral precepts and to enter into the wonders of its dispensations, can form no other idea of this revelation, but that of a confused rhapsody of fictions and absurdities.

If it is asked, was Christianity then intended only for learned Divines and profound philosophers? I answer, No. It was at first preached by the illiterate, and received by the ignorant; and to such are the practical, which are the most necessary parts of it, sufficiently intelligible; but the proofs of its authority undoubtedly are not, because these must be chiefly drawn from other parts, of a speculative nature, opening to our inquiries inexhaustible discoveries concerning the nature, attributes and dispensations of God, which cannot be understood without some learning, and much attention. From these the generality of mankind

must necessarily be excluded, and must, therefore, trust to others for the grounds of their belief, if they believe at all. And hence, perhaps, it is, that faith, or easiness of belief, is so frequently, and so strongly recommended in the Gospel; because if men require proofs, of which they themselves are incapable, and those who have no knowledge on this important subject will not place some confidence in those who have, the illiterate and unattentive must ever continue in a state of unbelief. But then all such should remember, that in all sciences, even in the mathematics themselves, there are many propositions, which, on a cursory view, appear to the most accurate understandings uninstructed in that science, to be impossible to be true, which yet, on a closer examination, are found to be truths capable of the strictest demonstration; and that, therefore, in disquisitions on which we cannot determine without much learned investigation, reason uninformed is by no means to be depended on; and from hence they ought surely to conclude, that it may be at least as possible for them to be mistaken in disbelieving this revelation, who know nothing of the matter, as for those great masters of reason and erudition, Grotius, Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Lock, Addison, and Lyttelton, to be deceived in their belief; a belief, to which they firmly adhered after the most diligent and learned researches into the authenticity of its records, the completion of the prophecies, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adversaries; a belief, which they have testified to the world by their writings, without any other motive than their regard for truth, and the benefit of mankind. Should the few foregoing pages add but one mite to the treasures with which these learned writers have enriched the world; if they should be so fortunate as to persuade any of these minute philosophers to place some confidence in these great opinions, and to distrust their own; if they should be able to convince them, that, notwithstanding all unfavorable appearances, Christianity may not be altogether artifice and error; if they should prevail on them to examine it with some attention, or, if that is too much trouble, not to reject it without any examination at all; the purpose of this little work will be sufficiently answered. Had the arguments herein used, and the new hints here flung out, been more largely discussed, it might easily have been extended to a more considerable bulk; but then the busy would not have had leisure, nor the idle inclination to have read it. Should it ever have the honor to be admitted into such good company, they will immediately, I know, determine, that it must be the work of some enthusiast or methodist, some beggar or some madman. I shall therefore, beg leave to assure them, that the author is very far removed from all these characters. That he once, perhaps, believed as little as themselves; but having some leisure, and more curiosity, he employed them both in resolving a question which seemed to him of some importance—Whether Christianity was really an imposture founded on an absurd, incredible, and obsolete fable, as many suppose it? Or whether it is, what it pretends to be, a revelation communicated to mankind by the interposition of supernatural power? On a candid inquiry, he soon found, that the first was an absolute impossibility, and that its pre-

tensions to the latter were founded on the most solid grounds. In the farther pursuit of his examination he perceived, at every step, new lights arising, and some of the brightest from parts of it the most obscure, but productive of the clearest proofs, because equally beyond the power of human artifice to invent, and human reason to discover. These arguments, which have convinced him of the Divine origin of this religion, he has here put together in as clear and concise a manner as he was able, thinking they might have the same effect upon others, and being of opinion, that if there were a few more true Christians in the world, it would be beneficial to themselves, and by no means detrimental to the public.

72/5
LORD LYTTTELTON

ON THE

C O N V E R S I O N

OF

S. T. P A U L .

IN A LETTER

TO GILBERT WEST, ESQ.

New-York :

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OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.**

1835.



LORD LYTTTELTON
ON THE
CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL.

SIR,—In a late conversation we had together upon the subject of the Christian religion, I told you, that besides all the proofs of it which may be drawn from the prophecies of the old Testament, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, and the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I thought the conversion and the apostship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine revelation.

As you seemed to think that so compendious a proof might be of use to convince those unbelievers that will not attend to a longer series of arguments, I have thrown together the reasons upon which I support that proposition.

In the 26th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, writ by a cotemporary author, and a companion of St. Paul in preaching the Gospel (as appears by the book itself, chap. xx. v. 6. 13. 14. chap. xxvii. v. 1. &c.) St. Paul is said to have given himself this account of his conversion and teaching, to king Agrippa and Festus the Roman governor. "My manner of life from my youth, which was, at the first, among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, which knew me from the beginning (if they would testify) that after the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come; for which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto

thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister, and a witness both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which Moses and the prophets did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light to the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for the thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.* In another chapter, of the same book he gives in substance the same account to the Jews, adding these further particulars: "And I said, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, arise and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, brother Saul, receive thy sight: and the same hour I looked upon him. And he said, the God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst know his will, and see that just One, and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Acts, xxii. 10—16.

In the 9th chapter of the same book the author of it relates the same story with some other circumstances not mentioned in these accounts; As, that *Saul in a vision saw Ananias* before he came to him, *coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.** And that when Ananias had spoken to him, *immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales.* Acts, ix. 18.

And agreeably to all these accounts, St. Paul thus speaks of himself in the epistles he wrote to the several churches he planted; the authenticity of which cannot be doubted without overturning all rules, by

* Acts ix. 12.

hich the authority and genuineness of any writings can be proved or confirmed.

To the Galatians he says, "I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews' religion above many of mine equals in my nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood," &c. Gal. i. 11—16.

To the Philippians he says, "If any other man thinketh that he hath hereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews. As touching the law, a Pharisee: concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, and all things, but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."—Phil. iii. 4—8.

And in his epistle to Timothy he writes thus: "I thank Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." 1 Tim. i. 12, 13.

In other epistles he calls himself *an apostle by the will of God, by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ,—and not an apostle not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.** All which implies some miraculous call that made him an apostle. And to the Corinthians he says, after enumerating many appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, and last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Cor. xv. 8.

Now it must of necessity be, that the person attesting these things of himself, and of whom they are related in so authentic a manner, either as an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive; or he was an enthusiast who by the force of an over-heated imagination imposed on himself; or he was deceived by the fraud of others, and all that he said must be imputed to the power of that deceit; what he declared to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen; and therefore the Christian religion is a Divine revelation.

Now that he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive, I shall endeavor to prove, by showing that he could have no rational motives to undertake such an imposture, nor could he possibly carry it on with any success by the means we know to be employed.

* 2 Cor. i. 1. Col. i. 1. 1 Tim. i. 1. Gal. i. 1.

First then, the inducement to such an imposture must have been one of these two, either the hope of advancing himself by it in his temporal interest, credit, or power; or the gratification of some of his passions under the authority of it, and by the means it afforded.

Now these were the circumstances in which St. Paul declared his conversion to the faith of Christ Jesus; that Jesus, who called himself the Messiah, and Son of God, notwithstanding the innocence and holiness of his life, notwithstanding the miracles by which he attested his mission, had been crucified by the Jews as an impostor and blasphemers, which crucifixion not only must (humanly speaking) have intimidated others from following him, or espousing his doctrines, but served to confirm the Jews in their opinion that he could not be their promised Messiah, who according to all their prejudices was not to suffer in any manner, but to reign triumphant for ever here upon earth. His apostles indeed, though at first they appeared to be terrified by the death of their master, and disappointed in all their hopes, yet had surprisingly recovered their spirits again, and publicly taught in his name, declaring him to be risen from the grave, and confirming that miracle by many they worked, or pretended to work themselves. But the chief priests and rulers among the Jews were so far from being converted either by their words, or their works, that they had begun a severe persecution against them, put some to death, imprisoned others, and were going on with implacable rage against the whole sect. In all these severities St. Paul concurred, being himself a Pharisee, *bred up at the feet of Gamaliel*,* one of the chief of that sect: nor was he content in the heat of his zeal with persecuting the Christians who were at Jerusalem, but *breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*† His request was complied with, *and he went to Damascus with authority and commission from the high priest.*‡ At this instant of time, and under these circumstances, did he become a disciple of Christ. What could be his motive to take such a part? Was it the hope of increasing his wealth? The certain consequence of his taking that part was not only the loss of all that he had, but of all hopes of acquiring more. Those whom he left, were the disposers of wealth, of dignity, of power in Judea; those whom he went to, were indigent men, oppressed and kept down from all means of improving their fortunes. They among them who had more than the rest, shared what they had with their brethren, but with this assistance the whole community was hardly supplied with the necessaries of life. And even in churches he afterwards planted himself, which were much more wealthy than that of Jerusalem, so far was St. Paul from availing himself of their charity, or the veneration they had for him, in order to draw that wealth to himself, that he often refused to take any part of it for the necessaries of life.

Thus he tells the Corinthians, "Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labor, working with our own hands." 1. Cor. xv. 8.

* Acts vii. 35, 36.

† Acts ix. 1, 2.

‡ Acts xvi. 12.

In another epistle he writes to them, "Behold the third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be burthensome to you, for I seek not yours, but you; for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." 2. Cor. xii. 14.

To the Thessalonians he says, "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness; nor of men ought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travel: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable to any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God." And again in another letter to them he repeats the same testimony of his disinterestedness: "Neither did we eat any man's bread or naught, but wrought with labor and travel day and night, that we might not be chargeable to any of you.*" And when he took his farewell of the church of Ephesus, to whom he foretold that they should see him no more, he gives this testimony of himself, and appeals to them for the truth of it; "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me."† It is then evident both from the state of the church when St. Paul first came into it, and from his behavior afterwards, that he had no thoughts of increasing his wealth by becoming a Christian; whereas by continuing to be their enemy, he had almost certain hopes of making his fortune by the favor of those who were at the head of the Jewish state, to whom nothing could more recommend him than the zeal that he showed in that persecution. As to credit or reputation, that too lay all on the side he forsook. The sect he embraced was under the greatest and most universal contempt of any men in the world. The chiefs and leaders of it were men of the lowest birth, education, and rank. They had no one advantage of parts, or earning, or other human endowments to recommend them. The doctrines they taught were contrary to those, which they who were accounted the wisest and most knowing of their nation professed. The wonderful works that they did, were either imputed to magic or to imposture. The very author and head of their faith had been condemned as a criminal, and died on the cross between two thieves. Could the disciple of Gamaliel think he should gain any credit or reputation by becoming a teacher in a college of fishermen? Could he flatter himself, that either in or out of Judea the doctrines he taught could do him any honor? No; he knew very well that the preaching Christ crucified *was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness.*‡ He afterwards found by experience, that in all parts of the world, contempt was the portion of whoever engaged in preaching a mystery so repugnant to the world, to all its passions and pleasures, and so irreconcilable to the pride of human reason. *We are made* (says he to the Corinthians) *as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things unto this day.*§ Yet he went on as zealously as he set out, and *was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.* Certainly then the desire of glory, or ambition of making to himself a great name, was not his motive to

* 2 Thessa. iii. 8.

† Acts xx. 33, 34.

‡ 1 Cor. i. 23.

§ 1 Cor. iv. 13.

embrace Christianity. Was it then the love of power? Power! over whom? over a flock of sheep driven to the slaughter, whose shepherd himself had been murdered a little before. All he could hope from that power was to be marked out in a particular manner for the same knife, which he had seen so bloodily drawn against them. Could he expect more mercy from the chief priests and the rulers, than they had shown to Jesus himself? Would not their anger be probably fiercer against the deserter and betrayer of their cause, than against any other of the apostles. Was power over so mean and despised a set of men worth the attempting with so much danger? But still it may be said, there are some natures so fond of power that they will court it at any risk, and be pleased with it even over the meanest. Let us see then what power St. Paul assumed over the Christians. Did he pretend to any superiority over the other apostles? No; he declared himself *the least of them, and less than the least of all saints*.* Even in the churches he planted himself, he never pretended to any primacy or power above the other apostles; nor would he be regarded any otherwise by them, than as the instrument to them of the grace of God, and preacher of the Gospel, not as the head of a sect. To the Corinthians he writes in these words:—“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”† And in another place, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?”‡ “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves *your servants* for Jesus’ sake.” 2 Cor. iv. 5.

All the authority he exercised over them was purely of a spiritual nature, tending to their instruction and edification, without any mixture of that civil dominion in which alone an impostor can find his account. Such was the dominion acquired and exercised through the pretence of Divine inspiration, by many ancient legislators, by Minos, Rhadamanthus, Triptolemus, Lycurgus, Numa, Zaleucus, Zoroaster, Xamolxis, nay even by Pythagoras, who joined legislation to his philosophy, and like the others, pretended to miracles and revelations from God, to give a more venerable sanction to the laws he prescribed. Such, in later times, was attained by Odin among the Goths, by Mohammed among the Arabians, by Mango Copac among the Peruvians, by the Sofi family among the Persians, and that of the Xeriffs among the Moors. To such a dominion did also aspire the many false Messiahs among the Jews. In short, a spiritual authority was only desired as a foundation for temporal power, or as the support of it, by all these pretenders to Divine inspirations, and others whom history mentions in different ages and countries, to have used the same arts. But St. Paul innovated nothing in government or civil affairs, he meddled not with legislation, he formed no commonwealths, he raised no seditions, he affected no temporal power. Obedience to their rulers,§ was the doctrine he taught to the churches he planted, and what he taught he practised himself: nor did he use any of those soothing arts by which ambitious and cunning men recommend themselves to the favor of those whom they endeavor to

* Ephes. iii. 8. † 1 Cor. xv. 9.
§ Romans xii.

† 1 Cor. i. 12—17.

‡ 1 Cor. iii. 5.

subject to their power. Whatever was wrong in the disciples under his care he freely reprov'd, as it became a teacher from God, of which numberless instances are to be found in all his epistles. And he was as careful of them when he had left them, as while he resided among them, which an impostor would hardly have been, whose ends were centered all in himself. This is the manner in which he writes to the Philippians: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* And a little after he adds the cause why he interested himself so much in their conduct, "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all."† Are those the words of an impostor, desiring nothing but temporal power? No, they are evidently written by one who looked beyond the bounds of this life. But it may be said, that he affected at least an absolute spiritual power over the churches he formed. I answer, *he preached Christ Jesus, and not himself.* Christ was the head, he only the minister, and for such only he gave himself to them. He called those who assisted him in preaching the Gospel, his *fellow-laborers* and *fellow-servants*.

So far was he from taking any advantage of a higher education, superior learning, and more use of the world, to claim to himself any supremacy above the other apostles, that he made light of all these attainments, and declared, *that he came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, but determined to know nothing among those he converted save Jesus Christ and him crucified.* And the reason he gave for it was, *that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*‡ Now this conduct put him quite on a level with the other apostles, who knew Jesus Christ as well as he, and had the power of God going along with their preaching in an equal degree of virtue and grace. But an impostor, whose aim had been power, would have acted a contrary part; he would have availed himself of all those advantages, he would have extolled them as highly as possible, he would have set up himself by virtue of them, as head of that sect to which he acceded, or at least of the proselytes made by himself. This is no more than what was done by every philosopher who formed a school; much more was it natural in one who propagated a new religion.

We see that the bishops of Rome have claimed to themselves a primacy, or rather a monarchy over the whole Christian church. If St. Paul had been actuated by the same lust of dominion, it was much easier for him to have succeeded in such an attempt. It was much easier for him to make himself head of a few poor mechanics and fishermen, whose superior he had always been in the eyes of the world, than for the bishops of Rome to reduce those of Ravenna or Milan, and other great metropolitans, to their obedience. Besides the opposition they met with from such potent antagonists, they were obliged to support their pretensions in direct contradiction to those very Scriptures which they were

* Phil. ii. 12.

† Phil. ii. 15—17.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 1, 2—5.

forced to ground them upon, and to the indisputable practice of the whole Christian Church for many centuries. These were such difficulties as required the utmost abilities and skill to surmount. But the first preachers of the Gospel had easier means to corrupt a faith not yet fully known, and which in many places could only be known by what they severally published themselves. It was necessary indeed while they continued together, and taught the same people, that they should agree, otherwise the credit of their sect would have been overthrown; but when they separated, and formed different churches in distant countries, the same necessity no longer remained.

It was in the power of St. Paul to model most of the churches he formed, so as to favor his own ambition: for he preached the Gospel in parts of the world where no other apostles had been, *where Christ was not named till he brought the knowledge of him, avoiding to build upon another man's foundation**. Now had he been an impostor, would he have confined himself to just the same Gospel as was delivered by the other apostles, where he had such a latitude to preach what he pleased without contradiction? Would he not have twisted and warped the doctrines of Christ to his own ends, to the particular use and expediency of his own followers, and to the peculiar support and increase of his own power? That this was not done by St. Paul, or by any other of the apostles in so many various parts of the world as they travelled into, and in churches absolutely under their own direction; that the Gospel preached by them all should be one and the same, the doctrines agreeing in every particular, without any one of them attributing more to himself than he did to the others, or establishing anything even in point of order, or discipline different from the rest, or more advantageous to his own interest, credit or power, is a most strong and convincing proof of their not being impostors, but acting entirely by Divine inspiration.

If any one imagines that he sees any difference between the doctrines of St. James, and St. Paul concerning justification by faith or by works, let him read Mr. Locke's excellent comment upon the epistles of the latter; or let him only consider these words in the first epistle to the Corinthians, chap. ix. v. 27. *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away.*

If St. Paul had believed or taught, that faith without works was sufficient to save a disciple of Christ, to what purpose did he *keep under his body*, since his salvation was not to depend upon *that* being subjected to the power of his reason, but merely upon the *faith* he professed?—His *faith* was firm, and so strongly founded upon the most certain conviction, that he had no reason to doubt its continuance; how could he then think it possible, that while he retained that *saving faith*, he might nevertheless *be a cast away*? Or if he had supposed that his *election* and *calling* was of such a nature, as that it irresistibly impelled him to good, and restrained him from evil, how could he express any fear, lest the lusts of his body should prevent his salvation? Can such an apprehension be made to agree with the notions of absolute predestination, ascribed by some to St. Paul? He could have no doubt that the grace of God had been given to him in the most extraordinary manner; yet

* Rom. xv. 20.

we see, that he thought his election was not so certain, but that he might fall from it again through the natural prevalence of bodily appetites, if not duly restrained by his own voluntary care. This single passage is a full answer out of the mouth of St. Paul himself, to all the mistakes that have been made of his meaning in some obscure expressions concerning grace, election, and justification.

If then it appears, that St. Paul had nothing to gain by taking this part, let us consider, on the other hand, what he gave up, and what he had reason to fear. He gave up a fortune, which he was then in a fair way of advancing: he gave up that reputation, which he had acquired by the labors and studies of his whole life, and by a behavior which had been blameless, *touching the righteousness which is in the law.** He gave up his friends, his relations, and family, from whom he estranged and banished himself for life: he gave up that religion, *which he had profited in, above many his equals in his own nation,* and those *traditions of his fathers, which he had been more exceedingly zealous of.* How hard this sacrifice was to a man of his warm temper, and above all men, to a Jew, is worth consideration. That nation is known to have been more tenacious of their religious opinions than any other upon the face of the earth. The strictest and proudest sect among them was that of the Pharisees, under whose discipline St. Paul was bred. The departing therefore so suddenly from their favorite tenets, renouncing their pride, and from their disciple becoming their adversary, was a most difficult effort for one to make so nursed up in the esteem of them, and whose early prejudices were so strongly confirmed by all the power of habit, all the authority of example, and all the allurements of honor and interest. These were the sacrifices he had to make in becoming a Christian; let us now see what inconveniences he had to fear: the implacable vengeance of those he deserted; that sort of contempt which is hardest to bear, the contempt of those whose good opinion he had most eagerly sought, and all those other complicated evils, which he describes in his 2d Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xi. Evils, the least of which were enough to have frightened any impostor even from the most hopeful and profitable cheat. But where the advantage proposed bears no proportion to the dangers incurred, or the mischiefs endured, he must be absolutely out of his senses, who will either engage in an imposture, or, being engaged, persevere.

Upon the whole then, I think I have proved, that the desire of wealth, of fame, or of power, could be no motive to make St. Paul a convert to Christ, but that, on the contrary, he must have been checked by that desire, as well as by the just apprehension of many inevitable and insupportable evils, from taking a part so contradictory to his past life, to all the principles he had imbibed, and all the habits he had contracted. It only remains to be inquired, whether the gratification of any other passion under the authority of that religion, or by the means it afforded could be his inducement.

Now that there have been some impostors, who have pretended to revelations from God, merely to give loose to irregular passions, and set themselves free from all restraints of government, law, or morality, both ancient and modern history shows. But the doctrine preached by St.

* Phil. iii. 6.

† Gal. i. 14.

Paul is absolutely contrary to all such designs. His writings breathe nothing but the strictest morality, obedience to magistrates, order, and government, with the utmost abhorrence of all licentiousness, idleness, or loose behavior under the cloak of religion. We nowhere read in his works, that saints are above moral ordinances; that dominion or property is founded in grace; that there is no difference in moral actions; that any impulses of the mind are to direct us against the light of our reason, and the laws of nature; or any of those wicked tenets, from which the peace of society has been disturbed, and the rules of morality have been broken by men pretending to act under the sanction of a Divine revelation. Nor does any part of his life, either before or after his conversion to Christianity, bear any mark of a libertine disposition. As among the Jews, so among the Christians, his conversation and manners were blameless. Hear the appeal that he makes to the Thessalonians, upon his doctrine and behavior among them:—"Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe."* And to the Corinthians he says, *we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.* 2 Cor. vii. 2.†

It was not, then, the desire of gratifying any irregular passion, that could induce St. Paul to turn Christian, any more than the hope of advancing himself either in wealth, or reputation, or power. But still it is possible, some men may say, (and I would leave no imaginable objection unanswered,) that though St. Paul could have no selfish or interested view in undertaking such an imposture, yet, for the sake of its moral doctrines, he might be inclined to support the Christian faith, and make use of some pious frauds to advance a religion, which, though erroneous and false in its theological tenets, and in the fact upon which it is grounded was, in its precepts and influence, beneficial to mankind.

Now it is true, that some good men in the heathen world have both pretended to Divine revelations, and introduced or supported religions they knew to be false, under a notion of public utility. But besides that this practice was built upon maxims disclaimed by the Jews, (who, looking upon truth, not utility, to be the basis of their religion, abhorred all such frauds, and thought them injurious to the honor of God,) the circumstances they acted in were different from those of St. Paul.

The first reformers of savage, uncivilized nations, had no other way to tame those barbarous people, and to bring them to submit to order and government, but by the reverence which they acquired from this pretence. The fraud was therefore alike beneficial both to the deceiver and the deceived. And in all other instances which can be given of

* Thess. ii. 10. If Saint Paul had held any secret doctrines, or *esoteric*, (as the philosophers called them,) we should have probably found them in the letters he wrote to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, his bosom friends and disciples. But both the theological and moral doctrines are exactly the same in *them*, as those he wrote to the churches. A very strong presumptive proof of his being no impostor! Surely, had he been one, he would have given some hints in these private letters, of the cheat they were carrying on, and some secret directions to turn it to some worldly purposes of one kind or another. But no such thing is to be found in any one of them. The same disinterested, holy, and divine spirit breathes in all these, as in the other more public epistles.

† See also 2 Cor. i. 12, and iv. 2.

good men acting this part, they not only did it to serve good ends, but were secure of its doing no harm. Thus, when Lycurgus persuaded the Spartans, or Numa the Romans, that the laws of the one were inspired by Apollo, or those of the other by Egeria, when they taught their people to put great faith in oracles, or in augury, no temporal mischief, either to them or their people, could attend the reception of that belief. It drew on no persecutions, no enmity with the world. But at that time, when St. Paul undertook the preaching of the Gospel, to persuade any man to be a Christian, was to persuade him to expose himself to all the calamities human nature could suffer. This St. Paul knew; this he not only expected, but warned those he taught to look for it too.* The only support that he had himself, or gave to them, was, "That if they suffered with Christ, they should be also glorified *together*." And that "he reckoned that the sufferings of the present time were not worthy to be compared *with that glory*." Rom. viii. 17, 18. So likewise he writes to the Thessalonians: "We ourselves glory in you, in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, *for which also ye suffer*. Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense (or repay) tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled; rest with us, *when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, &c.*" 2 Thes. i. 4—7. And to the Corinthians he says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable." How much reason he had to say this, the hatred, the contempt, the torments, the deaths endured by the Christians in that age, and long afterwards, abundantly prove. Whoever professed the Gospel under these circumstances, without an entire conviction of its being a Divine revelation, must have been mad; and if he made others profess it by fraud or deceit, he must have been worse than mad; he must have been the most hardened villain that ever breathed. Could any man, who had in his nature the least spark of humanity, subject his fellow-creatures to so many miseries; or could one that had in his mind the least ray of reason, expose himself to share them with those he deceived, in order to advance a religion which he knew to be false, merely for the sake of its moral doctrines? Such an extravagance is too absurd to be supposed; and I dwell too long on a notion, that, upon a little reflection, confutes itself.

I would only add to the other proofs I have given, that St. Paul could have no rational motive to become a disciple of Christ, unless he sincerely believed in him, this observation: that whereas it may be objected to the other apostles, by those who are resolved not to credit their testimony, that having been deeply engaged with Jesus during his life, they were obliged to continue the same professions after his death, for the support of their own credit, and from having gone too far to go back; this can by no means be said of St. Paul. On the contrary, whatever force there may be in that way of reasoning, it all tends to convince us that St. Paul must have naturally continued a Jew, and an enemy of Christ Jesus. If they were engaged on one side, he was as

* 1 Thess. iii. 4. 2 Cor. vi. 4, 5. Eph. vi. 10—16. Phil. i. 23—30.

strongly engaged on the other; if shame withheld them from changing sides, much more ought it to have stopped him, who being of a higher education and rank in life a great deal than they, had more credit to lose, and must be supposed to have been vastly more sensible to that sort of shame. The only difference was, that they, by quitting their master after his death, might have preserved themselves, whereas he, by quitting the Jews, and taking up the cross of Christ, certainly brought on his own destruction.

As therefore no rational motive appears for St. Paul's embracing the faith of Christ, without having been really convinced of the truth of it; but, on the contrary, every thing concurred to deter him from acting that part; one might very justly conclude, that when a man of his understanding embraced that faith, he was in reality convinced of the truth of it; and that, by consequence, he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive.

But that no shadow of doubt may remain upon the impossibility of his having been such an impostor; that it may not be said, "The minds of men are sometimes so capricious, that they will act without any rational motives, they know not why, and so perhaps might St. Paul:" I shall next endeavor to prove, that if he had been so unaccountably wild and absurd, as to undertake an imposture so unprofitable and dangerous both to himself and those he deceived by it, he could not possibly have carried it on with any success, by the means that we know he employed.

First then, let me observe, that if his conversion, and the part that he acted in consequence of it, was an imposture, it was such an imposture as could not be carried on by one man alone. The faith he professed, and which he became an apostle of, was not his invention. He was not the author or beginner of it, and therefore it was not in his power to draw the doctrines of it out of his own imagination. With Jesus, who was the Author and Head of it, he had never had any communication before his death, nor with his apostles after his death, except as their persecutor. As he took on himself the office and character of an apostle, it was absolutely necessary for him to have a precise and perfect knowledge of all the facts contained in the Gospel, several of which had only passed between Jesus himself and his twelve apostles, and others more privately still, so that they could be known but to very few, being not yet made public by any writings; otherwise he would have exposed himself to ridicule among those who preached that Gospel with more knowledge than he; and as the testimony they bore would have been different in point of fact, and many of their doctrines and interpretations of Scripture repugnant to his, from their entire disagreement with those Jewish opinions in which he was bred up; either they must have been forced to ruin his credit, or he would have ruined theirs. Some general notices he might have gained of these matters from the Christians he persecuted, but not exact or extensive enough to qualify him for an apostle, whom the least error, in these points, would have disgraced, and who must have been ruined by it in all his pretensions to that inspiration, from whence the apostolical authority was chiefly derived.

It was therefore impossible for him to act this part but in confederacy at least with the apostles. Such a confederacy was still more necessary for him, as the undertaking to preach the Gospel did not only require an exact and particular knowledge of all it contained, but an apparent

power of working miracles; for to such a power all the apostles appealed in proof of their mission, and of the doctrines they preached. He was therefore to learn of them by what secret arts they so imposed on the senses of men, if this power was a cheat. But how could he gain these men to become his confederates? Was it by furiously persecuting them and their brethren, as we find that he did, to the very moment of his conversion? Would they venture to trust their capital enemy with all the secrets of their imposture, with those upon which all their hopes and credit depended? Would they put it in his power to take away not only their lives, but the honor of their sect, which they preferred to their lives, by so ill-placed a confidence? Would men, so secret as not to be drawn by the most severe persecutions to say one word which could convince them of being impostors, confess themselves such to their persecutor, in hopes of his being their accomplice? This is still more impossible than that he should attempt to engage in their fraud without their consent and assistance.

We must suppose then, that, till he came to Damascus, he had no communication with the apostles, acted in no concert with them, and learnt nothing from them except the doctrines which they had publicly taught to all the world. When he came there, he told the Jews, to whom he brought letters from the high priest and the synagogue against the Christians,* of his having seen in the way a great light from heaven, and heard Christ Jesus reproaching him with his persecution, and commanding him to go into the city, where it should be told him what he was to do. But to account for his choosing this method of declaring himself a convert to Christ, we must suppose, that all those who were with him, when he pretended he had this vision, were his accomplices; otherwise the story he told could have gained no belief, being contradicted by them whose testimony was necessary to vouch for the truth of it. And yet how can we suppose, that all these men should be willing to join in this imposture? They were probably officers of justice, or soldiers, who had been employed often before in executing the orders of the high priest and the rulers against the Christians. Or if they were chosen particularly for this expedition, they must have been chosen by them as men they could trust for their zeal in that cause. What should induce them to the betraying that business they were employed in? Does it even appear that they had any connection with the man they so lied for, before or after this time, or any reward from him for it? This is therefore a difficulty in the first outset of this imposture not to be overcome.

But further, he was to be instructed by one at Damascus. That instructor therefore must have been his accomplice, though they appeared to be absolute strangers to one another, and though he was a man of an excellent character, *who had a good report of all the Jews that dwelt at Damascus*, and so was very unlikely to have engaged in such an imposture. Notwithstanding these improbabilities, this man, I say, must have been his confidant and accomplice in carrying on this fraud, and the whole matter must have been previously agreed on between them. But here again the same objection occurs: how could this man venture to act such a dangerous part, without the consent of the other disciples,

* The disciples of Christ were not called Christians till after this time; but I use the name, as most familiar to us, and to avoid circumlocution.

especially of the apostles, or by what means could he obtain their consent? And how absurdly did they contrive their business, to make the conversion of Saul the effect of a miracle, which all those who were with him must certify did never happen! How much easier would it have been to have made him be present at some pretended miracle wrought by the disciples, or by Ananias himself, when none were able to discover the fraud, and have imputed his conversion to that, or to the arguments used by some of his prisoners, whom he might have discoursed with, and questioned about their faith, and the grounds of it, in order to color his intended conversion!

As this was the safest, so it was the most natural method of bringing about such a change; instead of ascribing it to an event which lay so open to detection. For (to use the words of St. Paul to Agrippa) *this thing was not done in a corner*,* but in the eye of the world, and subject immediately to the examination of those who would be the most strict in searching into the truth of it, the Jews at Damascus. Had they been able to bring any shadow of proof to convict him of fraud in this affair, his whole scheme of imposture must have been nipt in the bud. Nor were they at Jerusalem, whose commission he bore, less concerned to discover so provoking a cheat. But we find that, many years afterwards, when they had all the time and means they could desire to make the strictest inquiry, he was bold enough to appeal to Agrippa in the presence of Festus,† upon his knowledge of the truth of his story; who did not contradict him, though he had certainly heard all that the Jews could allege against the credit of it in any particular. A very remarkable proof both of the notoriety of the fact, and the integrity of the man, who, with so fearless a confidence, could call upon a king to give testimony for him, even while he was sitting in judgment upon him.

But to return to Ananias. Is it not strange, if this story had been an imposture, and he had been joined with Paul in carrying it on, that after their meeting at Damascus we never should hear of their consorting together, or acting in consort, or that the former drew any benefit from the friendship of the latter, when he became so considerable among the Christians? Did Ananias engage and continue in such a dangerous fraud without any hopes or desire of private advantage? Or was it safe for Paul to shake him off, and risk his resentment? There is, I think, no other way to get over this difficulty, but by supposing that Ananias happened to die soon after the other's conversion. Let us then take that for granted, without any authority either of history or tradition, and let us see in what manner this wondrous imposture was carried on by Paul himself. His first care ought to have been, to get himself owned and received as an apostle by the apostles. Till this was done, the bottom he stood upon was very narrow, nor could he have any probable means of supporting himself in any esteem or credit among the disciples. Intruders into impostures run double risks; they are in danger of being detected, not only by those upon whom they attempt to practice their cheats, but also by those whose society they force themselves into, who must always be jealous of such an intrusion, and much more from one who had always before behaved as their enemy. Therefore, to gain the apostles, and bring them to admit him into a participation of all their

* Acts xxvi.

† Acts xxvi.

mysteries, all their designs, and all their authority, was absolutely necessary at this time to Paul. The least delay was of dangerous consequence, and might expose him to such inconveniences as he never afterwards could overcome. But, instead of attending to this necessity, he went into Arabia, and then returned again to Damascus ; nor did he go to Jerusalem till three years were past. Gal. i. 17, 18.

Now this conduct may be accounted for, if it be true that (as he declares in his Epistle to the Galatians,) " he neither received the Gospel of any man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."* Under such a Master, and with the assistance of his Divine power, he might go on boldly without any human associates ; but an impostor so left to himself, so deprived of all help, all support, all recommendation, could not have succeeded.

Further : We find that at Antioch, he was not afraid *to withstand Peter to his face*, and even *to reprove him before all the disciples, because he was to be blamed.*† If he was an impostor, how could he venture so to offend that apostle, whom it so highly concerned him to agree with and please ? Accomplices in a fraud are obliged to show greater regard to each other ; such freedom belongs to truth alone.

But let us consider what difficulties he had to encounter among the Gentiles themselves, in the enterprise he undertook of going to them, making himself their apostle, and converting them to the religion of Christ. As this undertaking was the distinguishing part of his apostolical functions, that which, in the language of his epistles, he was particularly *called to* ; or which, to speak like an unbeliever, he chose and assigned to himself ; it deserves a particular consideration. But I shall only touch the principal points of it as concisely as I can, because you have in a great measure exhausted the subject in your late excellent book on the resurrection, where you discourse with such strength of reason and eloquence upon the difficulties that opposed the propagation of the Christian religion, in all parts of the world.

Now in this enterprise St. Paul was to contend, 1st, With the policy and power of the magistrate ; 2dly, With the interest, credit, and craft of the priests : 3dly, With the prejudice and passions of the people ; 4thly, With the wisdom and pride of the philosophers.

That in all heathen countries the established religion was interwoven with their civil constitution, and supported by the magistrate as an essential part of the government, whoever has any acquaintance with antiquity cannot but know. They tolerated, indeed, many different worship, (though not with so entire a latitude as some people suppose,) as they suffered men to discourse very freely concerning religion, provided they would submit to an exterior conformity with established rites ; nay, according to the genius of paganism, which allowed an intercommunity of worship, they in most places admitted, without any great difficulty, new gods and new rites ; but they nowhere endured any attempt to overturn the established religion, or any direct opposition made to it, esteeming that an unpardonable offence, not to the gods alone, but to the state. This was so universal a notion, and so constant a maxim of heathen policy, that when the Christian religion set itself up in opposition to all other religions, admitted no intercommunity with them, but de-

* Gal. i. 12.

† Gal. ii. 11. 14.

clared that the gods of the Gentiles *were not to be worshipped*, nor any society suffered between them and the *only true God*; when this new doctrine began to be propagated, and made such a progress as to fall under the notice of the magistrate, the civil power was every where armed with all its terrors against it. When, therefore, St. Paul undertook the conversion of the Gentiles, he knew very well, that the most severe persecutions must be the consequence of any success in his design.

Secondly, This danger was rendered more certain by the opposition he was to expect from the interest, credit, and craft of the priests. How gainful a trade they, with all their inferior dependants, made of those superstitions which he proposed to destroy; how much credit they had with the people, as well as the state, by the means of them, and how much craft they employed in carrying on their impostures, all history shows. St. Paul could not doubt that all these men would exert their utmost abilities to stop the spreading of the doctrines he preached; doctrines which struck at the root of their power and gain, and were much more terrible to them than those of the most atheistical sect of philosophers, because the latter contented themselves with denying their principles, but at the same time declared for supporting their practices, as useful cheats, or at least acquiesced in them as establishments authorized by the sanction of law. Whatever therefore, their cunning could do to support their own worship, whatever aid they could draw from the magistrate, whatever zeal they could raise in the people, St. Paul was to contend with, unsupported by any human assistance.

And thirdly, This he was to do in direct opposition to all the prejudices and passions of the people. Now had he confined his preaching to Judea alone, this difficulty would not have occurred in near so great a degree. The people were there so moved with the miracles the apostles had wrought, as well as by the memory of those done by Jesus, that in spite of their rulers, they began to be favorably disposed towards them; and we even find,* that the high-priest, and the council, had more than once been withheld from treating the apostles with so much severity as they desired to do *for fear of the people*. But in the people among the Gentiles no such dispositions could be expected: their prejudices were violent, not only in favor of their own superstitions, but in a particular manner against any doctrines taught by a Jew. As from their aversion to all idolatry, and irreconcilable separation from all other religions, the Jews were accused of hating mankind, so were they hated by all other nations: nor were they hated alone, but despised. To what a degree that contempt was carried, appears as well by the mention made of them in heathen authors, as by the complaints Josephus makes of the unreasonableness and injustice of it in his apology. What authority then could St. Paul flatter himself that his preaching would carry along with it, among people to whom he was at once both the object of national hatred, and national scorn? But besides this popular prejudice against a Jew, the doctrines he taught were such as shocked all their most ingrafted religious opinions. They agreed to no principles of which he could avail himself to procure their assent to the other parts of the Gospel he preached. To convert the Jews to Christ Jesus, he was

* Acts iv. 21. and v. 26.

able to argue from their own Scriptures, upon the authority of books which they owned to contain Divine revelations, and from which he could clearly convince them, that Jesus was *the very Christ*.^{*} But all these ideas were new to the Gentiles; they expected no Christ, they allowed no such Scriptures, they were to be taught the Old Testament as well as the New. How was this to be done by a man not even authorized by his own nation; opposed by those who were greatest, and thought wisest, among them; either quite single, or only attended by one or two more under the same disadvantages, and even of less consideration than he?

The light of nature indeed, without express revelations, might have conducted the Gentiles to the knowledge of one God the Creator of all things, and to that light St. Paul might appeal, as we find that he did.† But clear as it was, they had almost put it out by their superstitions, *having changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and serving the creature more than the Creator.*‡ And to this idolatry they were strongly attached, not by their prejudices alone, but by their passions, which were flattered and gratified in it, as they believed that their deities would be rendered propitious, not by virtue and holiness, but by offerings, and incense, and outward rites; rites which dazzled their senses by magnificent shows, and allured them by pleasures often of a very impure and immoral nature. Instead of all this the Gospel proposed to them no other terms of acceptance with God but a worship of him *in spirit and truth*, sincere repentance, and perfect submission to the Divine laws, the strictest purity of life and manners, and renouncing of all those lusts in which they had formerly walked. How unpalatable a doctrine was this to men so given up to the power of those lusts, as the whole heathen world was at that time! If their philosophers could be brought to approve it, there could be no hope that the people would relish it, or exchange the ease and indulgence which those religions they were bred up in allowed to their appetites, for one so harsh and severe. But might not St. Paul, in order to gain them, relax that severity? He might have done so, no doubt, and probably would, if he had been an impostor; but it appears by all his epistles, that he preached it as purely, and enjoined it as strongly as Jesus himself.

But supposing they might be persuaded to quit their habitual sensuality for the purity of the Gospel, and to forsake their idolatries, which St. Paul reckons amongst the works of the flesh,§ for the spiritual worship of the *one invisible God*, how were they disposed to receive the doctrine of the salvation of man by the cross of Jesus Christ? Could they who were bred in notions so contrary to that *great mystery*, to that *hidden wisdom of God, which none of the princes of this world knew*,|| incline to receive it against the instructions of all their teachers, and the example of all their superiors? Could they whose gods had almost all been powerful kings, and mighty conquerors, they, who at that very time paid Divine honors to the emperors of Rome, whose only title to deification was the imperial power; could they, I say, reconcile their ideas to a crucified *Son of God*, to a *Redeemer of mankind* on the

* Acts ix. 22. † Acts xiv. 17. xvii. 27, 28. ‡ Rom. i. 23, 25.
§ Gal. v. 19, 20. || 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8.

cross? Would they look there for him *who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; by whom and for whom were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers?** No, most surely the *natural man* (to speak in the words of St. Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 14.) *received not these things, for they are foolishness to him; neither could he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* I may therefore conclude, that in the enterprise of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul was to contend not only with the policy and power of the magistrates, and with the interest, credit, and craft of the priests; but also, with the prejudices and passions of the people.

I am next to show that he was to expect no less opposition from the wisdom and pride of the philosophers. And though some may imagine, that men who pretended to be raised and refined above vulgar prejudices and vulgar passions, would have been helpful to him in his design, it will be found upon examination that instead of assisting or befriending the Gospel, they were its worst and most irreconcilable enemies. For they had prejudices of their own still more repugnant to the doctrines of Christ than those of the vulgar, more deeply rooted, and more obstinately fixed in their minds. The wisdom upon which they valued themselves, chiefly consisted in vain metaphysical speculations, in logical subtleties, in endless disputes, in high-flown conceits of the perfection and self-sufficiency of human wisdom, in dogmatical positiveness about doubtful opinions, or sceptical doubts about the most clear and certain truths. It must appear at first sight, that nothing could be more contradictory to the first principles of the Christian religion, than those of the atheistical, or sceptical sects, which at that time prevailed very much both among the Greeks and the Romans; nor shall we find that the theistical were much less at enmity with it, when we consider the doctrines they held upon the nature of God and the soul.

But I will not enlarge on a subject which the most learned Mr. Warburton has handled so well.† If it were necessary to enter particularly into this argument, I could easily prove that there was not one of all the different philosophical sects then upon earth, not even the Platonics themselves, who are thought to favor it most, that did not maintain some opinions fundamentally contrary to those of the Gospel. And in this they all agreed, to explode as most unphilosophical, and contrary to every notion that any among them maintained, that great article of the Christian religion, upon which the foundations of it are laid, and without which St. Paul declares to his proselytes, *their faith would be vain*,‡ the resurrection of the dead with their bodies, of which resurrection Christ was the first-born.§ Besides the contrariety of their tenets to those of the Gospel, the pride that was common to all the philosophers, was of itself an almost invincible obstacle against the admission of the evangelical doctrines calculated to humble that pride, and teach them, that *professing themselves to be wise they became fools*.|| This pride was no less intractable, no less averse to the instructions of Christ, or of

* Col. i. 15, 16.

† See "The Divine Legation of Moses, l. iii." See also a late pamphlet, entitled, "A critical Enquiry into the opinions and practices of the ancient philosophers concerning the nature of the soul, and a future state."

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 17, 20.

§ Col. i. 18.

|| Rom. i. 22.

his apostles, than that of the scribes and pharisees. St. Paul was therefore to contend in his enterprise of converting the Gentiles, with all the opposition that could be made to it by all the different sects of philosophers. And how formidable an opposition this was, let those consider who are acquainted from history with the great credit those sects had obtained at that time in the world, a credit even superior to that of the priests. Whoever pretended to learning or virtue was their disciple; the greatest magistrates, generals, kings, ranged themselves under their discipline, were trained up in their schools, and professed the opinions they taught.

All these sects made it a maxim not to disturb the popular worship, or established religion; but under those limitations they taught very freely whatever they pleased, and no religious opinions were more warmly supported, than those they delivered were by their followers. The Christian religion at once overturned their several systems, taught a morality more perfect than theirs, and established it upon higher and much stronger foundations, mortified their pride, confounded their learning, discovered their ignorance, ruined their credit. Against such an enemy what would they not do? Would not they exert the whole power of their rhetoric, the whole art of their logic, their influence over the people, their interest with the great, to discredit a novelty so alarming to them all? If St. Paul had had nothing to trust to but his own natural faculties, his own understanding, knowledge, and eloquence, could he have hoped to be singly a match for all theirs united against him? Could a teacher unheard of before, from an obscure and unlearned part of the world, have withstood the authority of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, Arcefilaus, Carneades, and all the great names which held the first rank of human wisdom? He might as well have attempted alone or with the help of Barnabas and Silas and Timotheus and Titus, to have erected a monarchy, upon the ruins of all the several states then in the world, as to have erected Christianity upon the destruction of all the several sects of philosophy, which reigned in the minds of the Gentiles, among whom he preached, particularly the Greeks and the Romans.

Having thus proved, as I think, that in the work of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul could have no assistance, but was sure on the contrary of the utmost repugnance and opposition to it imaginable from the magistrates, from the priests, from the people, and from the philosophers; it necessarily follows, that to succeed in that work he must have called in some extraordinary aid; some stronger power than that of reason and argument. Accordingly we find, he tells the Corinthians, *that his speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power.** And to the Thessalonians he says, *Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost.†* It was to the efficacy of the Divine Power that he ascribed all his success in those countries, and wherever else he planted the Gospel of Christ. If that power really went with him, it would enable him to overcome all those difficulties that obstructed his enterprise, but *then he was not an impostor*: our inquiry therefore must be whether (supposing him to have been an impostor) he could by *pretending to miracles* have overcome all those difficulties, and carried on his work with success?

* 1 Cor. ii. 4.

† 1 Thess. i. 5.

Now to give miracles, falsely pretended to, any reputation, two circumstances are principally necessary, *an apt disposition* in those whom they are designed to impose upon, and a *powerful confederacy* to carry on, and abet the cheat. Both these circumstances, or at least one of them, have always accompanied all the false miracles ancient and modern, which have obtained any credit among mankind. To both these was owing the general faith of the heathen world in oracles, auspices, auguries, and other impostures, by which the priests combined with the magistrates, supported the national worship, and deluded a people prepossessed in their favor, and willing to be deceived. Both the same causes likewise co-operate in the belief that is given to Popish miracles among those of their own church. But neither of these assisted St. Paul. What prepossession could there have been in the minds of the Gentiles, either in favor of him, or the doctrines he taught? Or, rather, what prepossessions could be stronger than those, which they undoubtedly had against both? If he had remained in Judea, it might have been suggested by unbelievers, that the Jews were *a credulous people apt to seek after miracles*, and to afford them an easy belief; and that the fame of those said to be done by Jesus himself, and by his apostles, before Paul declared his conversion, had predisposed their minds, and warmed their imaginations to the admission of others supposed to be wrought by the same power.

The signal miracle of the apostles speaking with tongues on the day of Pentecost had made three thousand converts; that of healing the lame man at the gate of the temple five thousand more.* Nay such was the faith of the multitude, that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, *that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.*† Here was therefore a good foundation laid for Paul to proceed upon in pretending to similar miraculous works; though the priests and the rulers were hardened against them, the people were inclined to give credit to them, and there was reason to hope for success among *them* both at Jerusalem, and in all the regions belonging to the Jews. But no such dispositions were to be found in the Gentiles. There was among them no matter prepared for imposture to work upon, no knowledge of Christ, no thought of his power, or of the power of those who came in his name. Thus when at Lystra St. Paul healed the man who was a cripple from his birth,‡ so far were the people there from supposing that he could be able to do such a thing *as an apostle of Christ*, or by any virtue derived from him, that they took Paul and Barnabas to be *gods* of their own come down *in the likeness of men*, and would have sacrificed to them as such.

Now I ask, did the citizens of Lystra concur in this matter to the deceiving of themselves? Were their imaginations overheated with any conceits of a miraculous power belonging to Paul, which could dispose them to think he worked such a miracle when he did not? As the contrary is evident, so in all other places to which he carried the Gospel it may be proved to demonstration, that he could find no disposition, no aptness, no bias to aid his imposture, if the miracles, by which he every where confirmed his preaching, had not been true.

On the other hand let us examine, whether without the advantage of such an assistance there was any *confederacy* strong enough to impose his false miracles upon the Gentiles, who were both unprepared and un-

* Acts ii. 41. iv. 4.

† Acts v. 15.

‡ Acts xiv.

disposed to receive them. The contrary is apparent. He was in no combination with their priests or their magistrates; no *sect* or *party* among them gave him any help; all eyes were open and watchful to detect his impostures, all hands ready to punish him as soon as detected. Had he remained in Judea, he would at least have had many confederates, all the apostles, all the disciples of Christ, at that time pretty numerous; but in preaching to the Gentiles he was often alone, never with more than two or three companions, or followers. Was this a confederacy powerful enough to carry on such a cheat, in so many different parts of the world, against the united opposition of the magistrates, priests, philosophers, people, all combined to detect and expose their frauds?

Let it be also considered, that those upon whom they practised these arts were not a gross or ignorant people, apt to mistake any uncommon operations of nature, or juggling tricks, for miraculous acts. The churches planted by St. Paul were in the most enlightened parts of the world, among the Greeks of Asia and Europe, among the Romans, in the midst of science, philosophy, freedom of thought, and in an age more inquisitively curious into the powers of nature, and less inclined to credit religious frauds than any before it. Nor were they only the lowest of the people that he converted. Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Paphos, Erastus,* chamberlain of Corinth, and Dionysius, the Areopagite, were his proselytes.

Upon the whole it appears beyond contradiction, that his pretension to miracles was not assisted by the *disposition* of those whom he designed to convert by those means, nor by any powerful *confederacy* to carry on, and abet the cheat, without both which concurring circumstances, or one at least, no such pretension was ever supported with any success.

Both these circumstances concurred even in the late famous miracles supposed to be done at Abbe Paris's tomb. They had not indeed the support of the government, and for that reason appear to deserve more attention than other Popish miracles; but they were supported by all the Janesenisists, a very powerful and numerous party in France, made up partly of wise and able men, partly of bigots and enthusiasts. All these confederated together to give credit to miracles, said to be worked in behalf of their party: and those who believed them were strongly disposed to that belief. And yet, with these advantages, how easily were they suppressed! Only by walling up that part of the church, where the tomb of the saint, who was supposed to work them, was placed! Soon after this was done, a paper was fixed on the wall with this inscription:

De par le roy defense a Dieu
De faire miracle en ce lieu.

By command of the king, God is forbidden to work any more miracles here. The pasquinade was a witty one, but the event turned the point of it against the party by which it was made: for if God had really worked any miracles there, could this absurd prohibition have taken effect? Would he have suffered his purpose to be defeated by building a wall? When all the apostles were shut up in prison to hinder their working of miracles, the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, and let them out.† But the power of Abbe Paris could neither throw

* *Οικονόμος* τῆ πόλεως, Treasurer or bailiff of a city.

† Acts v. 16—26.

down the wall that excluded his votaries, nor operate through that impediment. And yet his miracles are often compared with, and opposed by unbelievers to those of Christ and his apostles, which is the reason of my having taken this particular notice of them here. But to go back to the times nearer to St. Paul's. There is in Lucian an account of a very extraordinary and successful imposture carried on in his days, by one Alexander of Pontus, who introduced a new god into that country, whose prophet he called himself, and in whose name he pretended to miracles, and delivered oracles, by which he acquired great wealth and power. All the arts by which this cheat was managed are laid open by Lucian, and nothing can better point out the difference between imposture and truth, than to observe the different conduct of this man and St. Paul. Alexander made no alteration in the religion established in Pontus before; he only grafted his own upon it; and spared no pains to interest in the success of it the whole *heathen* priesthood, not only in Pontus, but all over the world, sending great numbers of those who came to consult him to other oracles, that were at that time in the highest vogue; by which means he engaged them all to support the reputation of his, and abet his imposture. He spoke with the greatest respect of all the sects of philosophy, except the Epicureans, who from their principles he was sure would deride and oppose his fraud; for though they presumed not to innovate, and overturn established religions, yet they very freely attacked and exposed all innovations that were introduced under the name of religion, and had not the authority of a legal establishment. To get the better of their opposition, as well as that of the Christians, he called in the aid of persecution and force, exciting the people against them, and answering objections with stones. That he might be sure to get money enough he delivered this oracle in the name of his god: *I command you to grace with gifts my prophet and minister; for I have no regard for riches myself, but the greatest for my prophet.* And he shared the gains that he made, which were immense, among an infinite number of associates, and instruments, whom he employed in carrying on and supporting his fraud. When any declared themselves to be his enemies, against whom he durst not proceed by open force, he endeavored to gain them by blandishments, and having got them into his power, to destroy them by secret ways; which arts he practised against Lucian himself. Others he kept in awe and dependence upon him, by detaining in his own hands the written questions they had proposed to his god upon state affairs; and as these generally came from men of the greatest power and rank, his being possessed of them was of infinite service to him, and made him master of all their credit and of no little part of their wealth.

He obtained the protection and friendship of Rutilianus, a great Roman general, by flattering him with promises of a very long life, and exaltation to deity after his death; and at last having quite turned his head, enjoined him by an oracle to marry his daughter, whom he pretended to have had by the moon: which command Rutilianus obeyed, and by his alliance secured this impostor from any danger of punishment; the Roman governor of Bithynia and Pontus excusing himself on that account from doing justice upon him, when Lucian and several others offered themselves to be his accusers.

He never quitted that ignorant and barbarous country, which he had made choice of at first as the fittest place to play his tricks in undis-

covered ; but residing himself among those superstitious and credulous people, extended his fame to a great distance by the emissaries which he employed all over the world, especially at Rome, who did not pretend themselves to work any miracles, but only promulgated his, and gave him intelligence of all that it was useful for him to know.

These were the methods by which this remarkable fraud was conducted, every one of which is directly opposite to all those used by St. Paul in preaching the gospel ; and yet such methods alone could give success to a cheat of this kind. I will not mention the many debaucheries, and wicked enormities, committed by this false prophet under the mask of religion, which is another characteristic difference between him and St. Paul ; nor the ambiguous answers, cunning evasions, and juggling artifices which he made use of, in all which it is easy to see the evident marks of an imposture, as well as in the objects he plainly appears to have had in view. That which I chiefly insist upon is the strong confederacy with which he took care to support his pretension to miraculous powers, and the apt disposition in those he imposed upon to concur and assist in deceiving themselves ; advantages entirely wanting to the apostle of Christ.

From all this I think it may be concluded, that no human means employed by St. Paul in his design of converting the Gentiles, were or could be adequate to the great difficulties he had to contend with, or to the success that we know attended his work ; and we can in reason ascribe that success to no other cause, but the power of God going along with and aiding his ministry, because no other was equal to the effect.

Having then shown that St. Paul had *no rational motives* to become an apostle of Christ, without being himself convinced of the truth of that gospel he preached, and that, had he engaged in such an imposture without any rational motives, he would have had *no possible means* to carry it on with any *success* ; having also brought reasons of a very strong nature, to make it appear, that the success he undoubtedly had in preaching the gospel was an effect of the Divine power attending his ministry, I might rest all my proof of the Christian religion being a Divine revelation upon the arguments drawn from this head alone. But to consider this subject in all possible lights, I shall pursue the proposition which I set out with through each of its several parts ; and having proved, as I hope, to the conviction of any impartial man, that St. Paul was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive, I come next to consider whether he was an *enthusiast*, who by the force of an overheated imagination imposed upon himself.

Now these are the ingredients of which *enthusiasm* is generally composed ; great heat of temper, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity, or self conceit. That the first of these qualities was in St. Paul may be concluded from that fervor of zeal with which he acted both as a Jew and Christian, in maintaining that which he thought to be right ; and hence, I suppose, as well as from the impossibility of his having been an impostor, some unbelievers have chosen to consider him as an *enthusiast*. But this quality alone, will not be sufficient to prove him to have been so, in the opinion of any reasonable man. The same temper has been common to others, who undoubtedly were not *enthusiasts*, to the Gracchi, to Cato, to Brutus, to many more among the best and wisest of men. Nor does it appear that this disposition had such a mastery over the mind of St. Paul, that he was not able at all times

rule and control it by the dictates of reason. On the contrary he was so much the master of it, as, in matters of an indifferent nature, to *become all things to all men*,* bending his notions and manners to theirs, so far as his duty to God would permit, with the most pliant condescension; a conduct neither compatible with the stiffness of a bigot, nor the violent impulses of fanatic delusions. His zeal was eager and warm but tempered with prudence, and even with the civilities and decorums of life, as appears by his behavior to Agrippa, Festus, and Felix; not the blind, inconsiderate, indecent zeal of an enthusiast.

Let us now see if any one of those other qualities which I have laid down, as disposing the mind to enthusiasm, and as being characteristic of it, belong to St. Paul. First as to melancholy, which of all dispositions of body or mind is most prone to enthusiasm,† it neither appears by his writings, nor by any thing told of him in the Acts of the Apostles, nor by any other evidence, that St. Paul was inclined to it more than other men. Though he was full of remorse for his former ignorant persecution of the church of Christ, we read of no gloomy penances, no extravagant mortification, such as the Brahmins, the Jaugues, the monks of La Trappe, and other melancholy enthusiasts inflict on themselves. His holiness only consisted in the simplicity of a good life, and the unwearied performance of those apostolical duties to which he was called. The sufferings he met with on that account he cheerfully bore, and even rejoiced in them for the love of Christ Jesus, but he brought none on himself; we find on the contrary, that he pleaded the privilege of a Roman citizen to avoid being whipped. I could mention more instances of his having used the best methods that prudence could suggest, to escape danger, and shun persecution, whenever it could be done without betraying the duty of his office or the honor of God.

A remarkable instance of this appears in his conduct among the Athenians. There was at Athens a law which made it capital to introduce or teach any new gods in their state.‡ Therefore when Paul was preaching *Jesus and the resurrection* to the Athenians, some of them carried him before the court of Areopagus (the ordinary judges of criminal matters, and in a particular manner entrusted with the care of religion,) as having broken this law, and being *a setter forth of strange gods*. Now in this case an impostor would have retracted his doctrine to save his life, and an *enthusiast* would have lost his life without trying to save it by innocent means. St. Paul did neither the one nor the other; he availed himself of an altar which he had found in the city, inscribed *to the unknown God*, and pleaded that he did not propose to them the worship of any new God, but only explain to them one whom their government had already received; *whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you*. By this he avoided the law, and escaped being condemned by the Areopagus, without departing in the least from the truth of the Gospel, or violating the honor of God. An admirable proof in my opinion, of the good sense with which he acted, and one that shows there was no mixture of fanaticism in his religion.

Compare with this the conduct of Francis of Assisi, of Ignatius Loyola, and other enthusiasts sainted by Rome, it will be found the reverse of St. Paul's. "*He wished indeed to die, and be with Christ;*"

* 1 Cor. ix. 20—22.

† Josephus cont. Apion. l. ii. c. 37.

‡ Acts xvii, and Josephus cont. Apion. l. ii. c. 7.

but such a wish is no proof of melancholy, or of enthusiasm; it only proves his conviction of the Divine truths he preached, and of the happiness laid up for him in those blessed abodes which had been shown to him even in this life. Upon the whole, neither in his actions, nor in the instructions he gave to those under his charge, is there any tincture of melancholy, which yet is so essential a characteristic of enthusiasm, that I have scarce ever heard of any enthusiast, ancient or modern, in whom some very evident marks of it did not appear.

As to ignorance, which is another ground of enthusiasm, St. Paul was so far from it, that he appears to have been master not of the Jewish learning alone, but of the Greek. And this is one reason why he is less liable to the imputation of having been an enthusiast than the other apostles, though none of them were such any more than he, as may by other arguments be invincibly proved.

I have mentioned credulity as another characteristic and cause of enthusiasm, which that it was not in St. Paul, the history of his life undeniably shows. For on the contrary, he seems to have been slow and hard of belief in the extremest degree, having paid no regard to all the miracles done by our Saviour, the fame of which he could not be a stranger to, as he lived in Jerusalem, nor to that signal one done after his resurrection, and in his name, by Peter and John, upon the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple; nor to the evidence given in consequence of it by Peter, in presence of the high-priest, the rulers, elders, and scribes, that *Christ was raised from the dead.** He must also have known, that when *all the apostles had been shut up in the common prison, and the high-priest, the council, and all the senate of the children of Israel had sent their officers to bring them before them, the officers came and found them not in prison, but returned and made this report: "The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors, but when we had opened we found no man within."* And that the council was immediately told, *that the men they had put in prison were standing in the temple, and teaching the people. And that being brought from thence before the council they had spoke these memorable words, "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of those things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God has given to them that obey him."*† All this he resisted, and was consenting to the murder of Stephen who preached the same thing, and evinced it by miracles.‡ So that his mind, far from being disposed to a credulous faith, or a too easy reception of any miracle worked in proof of the christian religion, appears to have been barred against it by the most obstinate prejudices, as much as any man's could possibly be; and from hence we may fairly conclude, that nothing less than the irresistible evidence of *his own senses*, clear from all possibility of doubt, could have overcome his unbelief.

Vanity or self conceit is another circumstance that for the most part prevails in the character of an enthusiast. It leads men of a warm temper, and religious turn, to think themselves worthy of the special regard, and extraordinary favors of God; and the breath of that inani-

* Acts iii.

† Acts v. 18—32.

‡ Acts viii

ration to which they pretend is often no more than the wind of this vanity, which puffs them up to such extravagant imaginations. This strongly appears in the writings and lives of some enthusiastical heretics, in the mystics both ancient and modern, in many founders of orders and saints both male and female, amongst the Papists, in several Protestant sectaries of the last age, and even in some of the Methodists now.* All the Divine communications, illuminations, and extacies to which they have pretended, evidently sprung from much self-conceit, working together with the vapors of melancholy upon a warm imagination. And this is one reason, besides the contagious nature of melancholy, or fear, that makes enthusiasm so very catching among weak minds. Such are most strongly disposed to vanity; and when they see others pretend to extraordinary gifts, are apt to flatter themselves that they may partake of them as well as those whose merit they think no more than their own. Vanity therefore may justly be deemed a principal source of enthusiasm. But that St. Paul was as free from it as any man, I think may be gathered from all that we see in his writings, or know of his life. Throughout his epistles there is not one word that savors of vanity, nor is any action recorded of him, in which the least mark of it appears.

In his epistle to the Ephesians he calls himself *less than the least of all saints*,† And to the Corinthians he says, *he is the least of the apostles, and not meet to be called an apostle, because he had persecuted the church of God*.‡ In his epistle to Timothy he says: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, *of whom I am chief*. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting." 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

It is true indeed, that in another epistle he tells the Corinthians, *that he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles*.§ But the occasion which drew from him these words must be considered. A false teacher by faction and calumny had brought his apostleship to be in question among the Corinthians. Against such an attack not to have asserted his apostolical dignity, would have been a betraying of the office and duty committed to him by God. He was therefore constrained to do himself justice, and not let down that character, upon the authority of which the whole success and efficacy of his ministry among them depended. But how did he do it? Not with that wantonness which a vain man indulges, when he can get any opportunity of commending himself: not with a pompous detail of all the amazing miracles, which he had performed in different parts of the world, though he had so fair an occasion of doing it, but with a modest and simple exposition of his abundant labors and sufferings in preaching the gospel, and barely reminding them, "that the signs of an apostle had been wrought *among them* in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds."|| Could he say less than this? Is not such boasting *humility itself*? And yet for this he makes many apologies, expressing the greatest uneasiness

* See the account of Montanus and his followers, the writings of the counterfeit Dionysius the Areopagite, Santa Theresa, St. Catherine of Sienna, Madame Bourignon, the lives of St. Francis of Assisi, and Ignatius Loyola; see also an account of the lives of George Fox, and of Rice Evans.

† Ephes. iii. 8.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 9.

§ 2 Cor. xi. 5.

|| 2 Cor. xii. 12.

in being obliged to speak thus of himself, even in his own vindication.* When in the same epistle, and for the same purpose, he mentions the vision he had of heaven, how modestly does he do it! Not in his own name, but in the third person, *I knew a man in Christ, &c. caught up into the third heaven.*† And immediately after he adds, *but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.*‡ How contrary is this to a spirit of vanity! how different from the practice of enthusiastic pretenders to raptures and visions, who never think they can dwell long enough upon those subjects, but fill whole volumes with their accounts of them? Yet St Paul is not satisfied with this forbearance, he adds the confession of some *infirmity*, which he tells the Corinthians was given to him as an allay, *that he might not be above measure exalted through the abundance of his revelations.*§ I would also observe, that he says thisapture, or vision of paradise happened to him above fourteen years before. Now had it been the effect of a mere enthusiastical fancy, can it be supposed that in so long a period of time he would not have had many more raptures of the same kind? would not his imagination have been perpetually carrying him to heaven, as we find St. Theresa, St. Bridget, and St. Catharine were carried by theirs? And if vanity had been predominant in him, would he have remained fourteen years in absolute silence upon so great a mark of the Divine favor? No, we should certainly have seen his epistles filled with nothing else but long accounts of these visions, conferences with angels, with Christ, with God Almighty, mystical unions with God, and all that we read in the works of those sainted enthusiasts, whom I have mentioned before. But he only mentions this vision in answer to the false teacher who had disputed his apostolical power, and comprehends it all in three sentences, with many excuses for being compelled to make any mention of it at all.|| Nor does he take any merit to himself, even from the success of those apostolical labors which he principally boasts of in his epistle. For in a former one to the same church he writes thus, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth *any thing*, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.” And in another place of the same epistle he says, “by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all: *yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*” I Cor. xv. 10.

I think it needless to give more instances of the modesty of St. Paul. Certain I am, not one can be given that bears any color of vanity, or that vanity in particular, which so strongly appears in all enthusiasts, of setting their imaginary gifts above those virtues which make the essence of true religion, and the real excellency of a good man, or in the Scripture phrase, of a *saint*. In his first Epistle to the Corinthians he has these words, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinklingymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing. And though I

* 2 Cor. xi. 1. 16—19. 30.

§ 2 Cor. xii. 7.

† 2 Cor. xii. 2.

|| 2 Cor. xii. 1—11.

‡ 2 Cor. xii. 6.

bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."* Is this the language of enthusiasm? Did ever enthusiast prefer that universal benevolence which comprehends all moral virtues, and which (as appears by the following verses) is meant by charity here; did ever enthusiast I say, prefer that benevolence to *faith* and to *miracles*, to those religious opinions which he had embraced, and to those supernatural graces and gifts which he imagined he had acquired, nay even to the merit of martyrdom? Is it not the genius of enthusiasm to set moral virtues infinitely below the merit of faith, and of all moral virtues to value that least which is most particularly enforced by St. Paul, a spirit of candor, moderation, and peace? Certainly neither the temper, nor the opinions of a man subject to fanatic delusions, are to be found in this passage; but it may be justly concluded, that he who could esteem the value of charity so much above miraculous gifts, could not have pretended to any such gifts if he had them not in reality.

Since then it is manifest from the foregoing examination, that in St. Paul's disposition and character those qualities do not occur which seem to be necessary to form an enthusiast, it must be reasonable to conclude he was none. But allowing for argument's sake, that all those qualities were to be found in him, or that the heat of his temper alone could be a sufficient foundation to support such a suspicion; I shall endeavor to prove that he could not have imposed on himself by any power of enthusiasm, either in regard to the miracle that caused his conversion, or to the consequential effects of it, or to some other circumstances which he bears testimony to in his epistles.

The power of imagination in enthusiastical minds is no doubt very strong, but it always acts in conformity to the opinions imprinted upon it at the time of its working, and can no more act against them, than a rapid river can carry a boat against the current of its own stream. Now nothing can be more certain, than that when Saul set out for Damascus with an authority from the chief priests to *bring the Christians which were there, bound to Jerusalem*,† an authority solicited by himself, and granted to him at his own earnest desire, his mind was strongly possessed with opinions against Christ and his followers. To give those opinions a more active force his passions at that time concurred, being inflamed in the highest degree by the irritating consciousness of his past conduct towards them, the pride of supporting a part he had voluntarily engaged in, and the credit he found it procured him among the chief priests and rulers, whose commission he bore.

If in such a state and temper of mind, an enthusiastical man had imagined he saw a vision from heaven denouncing the anger of God against the Christians, and commanding him to persecute them without any mercy, it might be accounted for by the natural power of enthusiasm. But that in the very instant of his being engaged in the fiercest and hottest persecution against them, no circumstance having happened to change his opinions, or alter the bent of his disposition, he should at once imagine himself called by a heavenly vision to be the apostle of Christ, whom but a moment before he deemed an impostor and a blasphemer, that had been justly put to death on the cross, is in itself wholly incredible, and so far from being a probable effect of enthusiasm, that just a contrary effect must have been naturally produced by that cause.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 2—4.

† Acts xi. 2.

The warmth of his temper, carried him violently another way, and whatever delusions his imagination could raise to impose on his reason, must have been raised at that time agreeably to the notions imprinted upon it, and by which it was heated to a degree of enthusiasm, not in direct contradiction to all those notions, while they remained in their full force.

This is so clear a proposition, that I might rest the whole argument entirely upon it: but still farther to show that this vision could not be a phantom of St. Paul's own creating, I beg leave to observe, that he was not alone when he saw it; there were many others in company, whose minds were no better disposed than his to the Christian faith. Could it be possible, that the imaginations of all these men should at the same time be so strangely affected, as to make them believe that they saw a *great light shining about them, above the brightness of the sun at noon-day*, and heard the sound of a *voice from heaven*, though *not the words which it spake*,* when in reality they neither saw nor heard any such thing? Could they be so infatuated with this conceit of their fancy, as to *fall down from their horses* together with Saul, and be *speechless through fear*,† when nothing had happened extraordinary either to them or to him? Especially considering that this apparition did not happen in the night, when the senses are more easily imposed upon, but at mid-day. If a sudden frenzy had seized upon Saul, from any distemper of body or mind, can we suppose his whole company, men of different constitutions and understandings, to have been at once affected in the same manner with him, so that not the distemper alone, but the effects of it should exactly agree? If all had gone mad together, would not the frenzy of some have taken a different turn, and presented to them different objects? This supposition is so contrary to nature and all possibility, that unbelief must find some other solution, or give up the point.

I shall suppose then, in order to try to account for this vision without a miracle, that as Saul and his company were journeying along in their way to Damascus, an extraordinary meteor did really happen which cast a great light, as some meteors will do, at which they being affrighted fell to the ground in the manner related. This might be possible, and fear grounded on ignorance of such phenomena, might make them imagine it to be a vision of God. Nay even the voice or sound they heard in the air, might be an explosion attending this meteor, or at least there are those who would rather recur to such a supposition as this, however incredible, than acknowledge the miracle. But how will this account for the distinct words heard by St. Paul, to which he made answer? How will it account for what followed upon it when he came to Damascus, agreeably to the sense of those words which he heard? How came Ananias to go to him there and say, "He was chosen by God to know his will, and see that just One, and hear the voice of his mouth?"‡ Or why did he propose to him *to be baptized*? What connection was there between the meteor which Saul had seen, and these words of Ananias? Will it be said that Ananias was skilful enough to take advantage of the fright he was in at that appearance, in order to make him a Christian? But could Ananias inspire him with the vision in which he saw him before, he came? If that vision was the effect of imagination, how was it verified so exactly in fact?§ But allowing that he dreamt by chance of

* Acts ix. 3. xxii. 9. † Acts xxv. 14. ix 7. ‡ Acts xxii. 14. xxvi. 16. § Acts ix.

Ananias's coming, and that Ananias came by chance too, or if you please, that having heard of his dream, he came to take advantage of that, as well as of the meteor which Saul had seen, will this get over the difficulty? No, there was more to be done. Saul was struck blind, and had been so for three days. Now had this blindness been natural from the effects of a meteor or lightning upon him, it would not have been possible for Ananias to heal it, as we find that he did, merely by putting his hands on him and speaking a few words.* This undoubtedly surpassed the power of nature; and if this was a miracle, it proves the other to have been a miracle too, and a miracle done by the same Jesus Christ. For Ananias when he healed Saul spoke to him thus, *Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, has sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.*† And that he saw Christ both now and after this time, appears not only by what he relates,‡ but by other passages in his epistles.§ From him, as he asserts in many places of his epistles, he learned the gospel by immediate revelation, and by him he was sent to the Gentiles.|| Among those Gentiles from Jerusalem, and round about to Illyricum he preached the gospel of Christ, with mighty signs and wonders wrought by the power of the Spirit of God, to make them obedient to his preaching, as he himself testifies in his epistle to the Romans,¶ and of which a particular account is given to us in the Acts of the Apostles; signs and wonders indeed, above any power of nature to work, or of imposture to counterfeit, or of enthusiasm to imagine. Now does not such a series of miraculous acts, all consequential and dependent upon the first revelation, put the truth of that revelation beyond all possibility of doubt or deceit? And if he could so have imposed on himself as to think that he worked them when he did not (which supposition cannot be admitted, if he was not all that time quite out of his senses,) how could so *distempered an enthusiast* make such a progress, as we know that he did, in converting the Gentile world? If the difficulties which have been shown to have obstructed that work were such as the ablest impostor could not overcome, how much more insurmountable were they to a madman?

It is a much harder task for unbelievers to account for the success of St. Paul, in preaching the Gospel, upon the supposition of his having been an enthusiast, than of his having been an impostor. Neither of these suppositions can ever account for it; but the impossibility is more glaringly strong in this case than in the other. I could enter into a particular examination of all the miracles recorded in the Acts to have been done by St. Paul, and show that they were not of a nature in which enthusiasm either in him, or the persons he worked them upon, or the spectators could have any part. I will mention only a few. When he told Elymas the sorcerer, at Paphos, before the Roman deputy, that *the hand of God was upon him, and he should be blind, not seeing the sun for a season; and immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand,*** had enthusiasm in the doer or sufferer any share in this act? If Paul, as an enthusiast, had thrown out this menace, and the effect had not followed, instead of converting the deputy, as we are told that he did, he would

* Acts ix. 17, 18. xxii. 13.

§ 1 Cor. ix. 1. xv. 8.

** Acts xiii.

† Acts ix. 17.

|| Acts xxii. 21. xxiii. 11.

‡ Acts xxii. 17, 18.

¶ Rom. xv. 19.

have drawn on himself his rage and contempt. But the effect upon Elymas could not be caused by enthusiasm in Paul, much less can it be imputed to an enthusiastic belief in that person himself, of his being struck blind, when he was not, by these words of a man whose preaching he strenuously and bitterly opposed. Nor can we ascribe the conversion of Sergius, which happened upon it, to any enthusiasm. A Roman proconsul was not very likely to be an enthusiast; but, had he been one, he must have been bigoted to his own gods, and so much the less inclined to believe any miraculous power in St. Paul. When at Troas, a young man named Eutychus, fell down from a high window, while Paul was preaching, and was taken up dead,* could any enthusiasm, either in Paul or the congregation there present, make them believe, that by that apostle's falling upon him, and embracing him, he was restored to life? Or could he who was so restored contribute any thing to himself, by any power of his own imagination? When in the isle of Melita, where St. Paul was shipwrecked, there came a viper and fastened on his hand, which he shook off, and felt no harm,† was that an effect of enthusiasm? An enthusiast might perhaps have been mad enough to hope for safety against the bite of a viper without any remedy being applied to it; but would that hope have prevented his death? Or were the barbarous islanders, to whom this apostle was an absolute stranger, prepared by enthusiasm to expect and believe that any miracle would be worked to preserve him? On the contrary, when they saw the viper hang to his hand, they said among themselves, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live." I will add no more instances: these are sufficient to show, that the miracles told of St. Paul can no more be ascribed to enthusiasm than to imposture.

But moreover, the power of working miracles was not confined to St. Paul; it was also communicated to the churches he planted in different parts of the world. In many parts of his first epistle he tells the Corinthians,‡ that they had among them many miraculous graces and gifts, and gives them directions for the more orderly use of them in their assemblies. Now, I ask, whether all that he said upon that head is to be ascribed to enthusiasm? If the Corinthians knew that they had among them no such miraculous powers, they must have regarded the author of that epistle as a man out of his senses, instead of revering him as an apostle of God.

If, for instance, a Quaker should, in a meeting of his own sect, tell all the persons assembled there, that to some among them was given the gift of healing by the Spirit of God, to others the working of other miracles, to others divers kinds of tongues; they would undoubtedly account him a madman, because they pretend to no such gifts. If indeed they were only told by him, that they were inspired by the Spirit of God in a certain ineffable manner, which they alone could understand, but which did not discover itself by any outward distinct operations or signs, they might mistake the impulse of enthusiasm for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; but they could not believe, *against the conviction of their own minds*, that they spoke tongues they did not speak, or heal distempers they did not heal, or worked other miracles when they worked none. If it be said the Corinthians might pretend to these powers, though the Quakers do not; I ask, whether, in that pretension, they

* Acts xii. 9.

† Acts xviii.

‡ 1 Cor. xii. 4, 5.

were impostors, or only enthusiasts? If they were impostors, and St. Paul was also such, how ridiculous was it for him to advise them, in an epistle writ *only to them*, and *for their own use*, not to value themselves too highly upon those gifts, to pray for one rather than another, and prefer charity to them all! Do associates in fraud talk such a language to one another? But if we suppose their pretension to all those gifts was an effect of enthusiasm, let us consider how it was possible that he and they could be so cheated by that enthusiasm, as to imagine they had such powers when they had not.

Suppose that enthusiasm could make a man think, that he was able, by a word or a touch, to give sight to the blind, motion to the lame, or life to the dead: would that conceit of his, make the blind see, the lame walk, or the dead revive? And if it did not, how could he persist in such an opinion, or, upon his persisting, escape being shut up for a mad-man? But such a madness could not infect so many at once, as St. Paul supposes at Corinth to have been endowed with the gift of healing or any other miraculous powers. One of the miracles which they pretended to was the speaking of languages they never had learned; and St. Paul says, he possessed this gift *more than them all*.* If this had been a delusion of fancy, if they had spoke only gibberish, or unmeaning sounds, it would soon have appeared, when they came to make use of it where it was necessary; viz. in converting of those who understood not any language they naturally spoke. St. Paul particularly, who traveled so far upon that design, and had such occasion to use it, must soon have discovered, that this imaginary gift of the spirit was no gift at all, but a ridiculous instance of frenzy, which had possessed both him and them. But, if those he spoke to in divers tongues understood what he said, and were converted to Christ by that means, how could it be a delusion? Of all the miracles recorded in Scripture, none are more clear from any possible imputation of being the effect of an enthusiastic imagination than this: for how could any man think that he had it, who had it not: or, if he did think so, not be undeceived, when he came to put his gift to the proof? Accordingly, I do not find such a power to have been ever pretended to by any enthusiast ancient or modern.

If then St. Paul, and the church of Corinth, were not deceived, in ascribing to themselves this miraculous power, but really had it, there is the strongest reason to think, that neither were they deceived in the other powers to which they pretended, as the same spirit which gave them that equally, could and probably would, give them the others to serve the same holy ends for which that was given. And, by consequence, St. Paul was no enthusiast in what he wrote upon that head to the Corinthians, nor in other similar instances where he ascribes to himself, or to the churches he founded, any supernatural graces and gifts. Indeed, they who would impute to imagination effects such as those which St. Paul imputes to the power of God attending his mission, must ascribe to imagination the same omnipotence which he ascribes to God.

Having thus, I flatter myself, satisfactorily shown, that St. Paul could not be an enthusiast, who, by the force of an overheated imagination, imposed on himself; I am next to inquire, whether he was deceived by the fraud of others, and whether all that he said of himself can be imputed to the power of that deceit? But I need say little to show the absurdity of this supposition. It was morally impossible for the disciples of Christ to conceive such a thought, as that of turning his persecu-

* 1 Cor. xiv. 18.

tor into his apostle, and to do this by a fraud, in the very instant of his greatest fury against them and their Lord. But could they have been so extravagant as to conceive such a thought, it was physically impossible for them to execute it in the manner we find his conversion to have been effected. Could they produce a light in the air, which at mid-day was brighter than that of the sun? Could they make Saul hear words from out of that light,* which were not heard by the rest of the company? Could they make him blind for three days after that vision, and then make scales fall from off his eyes, and restore him to his sight by a word? Beyond dispute no fraud could do these things; but much less still could the fraud of others produce those miracles subsequent to his conversion, in which he was not passive, but active, which he did himself, and appeals to in his epistles as proofs of his Divine mission. I shall then take it for granted, that he was not deceived by the fraud of others, and that what he said of himself cannot be imputed to the power of that deceit, no more than to wilful imposture, or to enthusiasm: and then it follows, that what he related to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen; and *therefore the Christian religion is a Divine revelation.*

That this conclusion is fairly and undeniably drawn from the premises, I think must be owned, unless some probable cause can be assigned to account for those facts so authentically related in the Acts of the Apostles, and attested in his epistles by St. Paul himself, other than any of those which I have considered; and this I am confident cannot be done. It must be therefore accounted for by the power of God. That God should work miracles for the establishment of a most holy religion, which from the insuperable difficulties that stood in the way of it, could not have established itself without such assistance, is no way repugnant to human reason: but that without any miracle such things should have happened, as no adequate natural causes can be assigned for, is what human reason cannot believe.

To impute them to magic, or the power of demons (which was the resource of the heathens and Jews against the notoriety of the miracles performed by Christ and his disciples,) is by no means agreeable to the notions of those, who in this age disbelieve Christianity. It will therefore be needless to show the weakness of that supposition: but that supposition itself is no inconsiderable argument of the truth of the facts. Next to the apostles and evangelists, the strongest witnesses of the undeniable force of that truth, are Celsus and Julian, and other ancient opponents of the Christian religion, who were obliged to solve what they could not contradict by such an irrational and absurd imagination.

The dispute was not then between faith and reason, but between religion and superstition. Superstition ascribed to cabalistical names, or magical secrets, such operations as carried along with them evident marks of the Divine power: religion ascribed them to God, and reason declared itself on that side of the question. Upon what grounds then can we now overturn that decision? Upon what grounds can we reject the unquestionable testimony given by St. Paul, that he was called by God to be a disciple and apostle of Christ? It has been shown, that we cannot impute it either to enthusiasm or fraud: how shall we then resist the conviction of such a proof? Does the doctrine he preached contain any precepts against the law of morality, that natural law written by God in the hearts of mankind? If it did, I confess that none of the

* Acts xxii. 9.

arguments I have made use of could prove such a doctrine to come from *him*. But this is so far from being the case, that even those who reject Christianity as a divine revelation, acknowledge the morals delivered by Christ and by his apostles to be worthy of God. It is then on account of the mysteries in the gospel that the facts are denied, though supported by evidence which in all other cases would be allowed to contain the clearest conviction, and cannot in this be rejected without reducing the mind to a state of absolute scepticism; and overturning those rules by which we judge of all evidence, and of the truth or credibility of all other facts? But this is plainly to give up the use of our understanding where we are able to use it most properly, in order to apply it to things of which it is not a competent judge. The motives and reasons upon which divine wisdom may think proper to act, as well as the manner in which it acts, must often lie out of the reach of our understanding; but the motives and reasons of human actions, and the manner in which they are performed, are all in the sphere of human knowledge, and upon them we may judge, with a well grounded confidence, when they are fairly proposed to our consideration.

It is incomparably more probable that a revelation from God concerning the ways of his Providence should contain in it matters above the capacity of our minds to comprehend, than that St. Paul, or indeed any of the other apostles should have acted, as we know that they did, upon any other foundations than certain knowledge of Christ's being risen from the dead; or should have succeeded in the work they undertook, without the aid of miraculous powers. To the former of these propositions I may give my assent without any direct opposition of reason to my faith; but in admitting the latter I must believe against all those probabilities that are the rational grounds of assent.

Nor do they who reject the Christian religion because of the difficulties which occur in its mysteries, consider how far that objection will go against other systems both of religion and of philosophy, which they themselves profess to admit. There are in *deism* itself, the most simple of all religious opinions, several difficulties, for which human reason can but ill account; which may therefore be not improperly styled *articles of faith*. Such is the origin of evil under the government of an all-good and all-powerful God; a question so hard, that the inability of solving it in a satisfactory manner to their apprehensions, has driven some of the greatest philosophers into the monstrous and senseless opinions of *manicheism* and *atheism*. Such is the reconciling the prescience of God with the free-will of man, which after much thought on the subject, Mr. Locke fairly confesses he could not do,* though he acknowledged both; and what Mr. Locke could not do, in reasoning upon subjects of a metaphysical nature, I am apt to think, few men, if any, can hope to perform.

Such is also the creation of the world at any supposed time, or the *eternal production* of it from God: it being almost equally hard according to mere philosophical notions, either to admit that the goodness of God could remain unexerted through all eternity before the time of such a creation, let it be set back ever so far, or to conceive an eternal production, which words so applied, are inconsistent and contradictory terms; the solution commonly given by a comparison to the emanation of light from the sun not being adequate to it, or just; for light is a quality inherent in fire, emanating from it; whereas matter is not a

* See his letter to Mr. Molyneux, p. 509, vol. 3.

quality inherent in or emanating from the divine essence, but of a different substance and nature, and if not *independent* and *self-existing*, must have been created, by a mere act of the divine will ; and, if created, then not eternal, the idea of creation implying a time *when the substance created did not exist*. But if to get rid of this difficulty, we have recourse, as many of the ancient philosophers had, to the *independent existence of matter*, then we must admit *two self-existing principles*, which is quite inconsistent with genuine theism or natural reason. Nay, could *that* be admitted, it would not clear up the doubt, unless we suppose not only the eternal existence of matter, independent of God, but that it was from eternity in the *order* and *beauty* we see it in now, without any *agency* of the divine power ; otherwise the same difficulty will always occur, why it was not before put into that *order* and state of *perfection* ; or how the goodness of God could so long remain in a state of inaction, *unexerted* and *unemployed*. For were the time of such an exertion of it put back ever so far, if, instead of five or six thousand years, we were to suppose millions of millions of ages to have passed since the world* was reduced out of a chaos, to an harmonious and regular form, still a whole eternity must have preceded that date, during which the divine attributes did not exert themselves in that beneficent work, so suitable to them, that the conjectures of human reason can find no cause for its being delayed.

But because of these difficulties, or any other that may occur in the system of deism, no wise man will deny the being of God, or his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, which are proved by such evidence, as carries the clearest and strongest conviction, and cannot be refused without involving the mind in far greater difficulties, even in downright absurdities and impossibilities. The only part therefore, that can be taken, is to account in the best manner that our weak reason is able to do, for such seeming objections ; and where that fails, to acknowledge its weakness, and acquiesce under the certainty, that our very imperfect knowledge or judgment cannot be the measure of the divine wisdom, or the universal standard of truth. So likewise it is with respect to the Christian religion. Some difficulties occur in that revelation which human reason can hardly clear : but as the truth of it stands upon evidence so strong and convincing, that it cannot be denied without much greater difficulties than those that attend the belief of it, as I have before endeavored to prove, we ought not to reject it upon such objections, however mortifying they may be to our pride. That indeed would have all things made plain to us, but God has thought proper to proportion our knowledge to our wants, not our pride. All that concerns our duty is clear ; and as to other points either of natural or revealed religion, if he has left some obscurities in them, is that any reasonable cause of complaint ? Not to rejoice in the benefit of what he has graciously allowed us to know, from a presumptuous disgust at our incapacity of knowing more, is as absurd as it would be to refuse to walk because we cannot fly.

From the arrogant ignorance of metaphysical reasonings, aiming at matters above our knowledge, arose all the speculative impiety, and many of the worst superstitions of the old heathen world, before the gospel was preached to bring men back again to the primitive faith ; and

* By the world I do not mean this earth alone, but the whole material universe, with all its inhabitants. Even created spirits fall under the same reasoning ; for they must also have had a beginning, and before that beginning an eternity must have preceded.

from the same source have since flowed some of the greatest corruptions of the evangelical truth, and the most inveterate prejudices against it; an effect just as natural as for our eyes to grow weak, and even blind, by being strained to look at objects too distant, or not made for them to see.

Are then our intellectual faculties of no use in religion? Yes, undoubtedly, of the most necessary use, when rightly employed. The proper employment of them is to distinguish its genuine doctrines from others erroneously or corruptly ascribed to it; to consider the importance and purport of them, with the connection they bear to one another: but first of all to examine with the strictest attention the evidence by which religion is proved internal as well as external. If the external evidence be convincingly strong, and there is no internal proof of its falsehood, but much to support and confirm its truth, then surely no difficulties ought to prevent our giving a full assent and belief to it. It is our duty indeed to endeavor to find the best solutions we can to them; but where no satisfactory ones are to be found, it is no less our duty to acquiesce with humility, and believe that to be right which we know is above us, and belonging to a wisdom superior to ours.

Nor let it be said, that this will be an argument for the admitting all doctrines, however absurd, that may have been grafted upon the Christian faith: those which can plainly be proved *not to belong to it*, fall not under the reasoning I have laid down (and certainly none do belong to it which contradict either our *clear, intuitive knowledge*, or the *evident principles and dictates of reason*.) I speak only of difficulties which attend the belief of the gospel in some of its pure and essential doctrines, plainly and evidently delivered there, which being made known to us by a *revelation* supported by *proofs* that our reason *ought to admit*, and not being such things as it can *certainly know to be false*, must be received by it as *objects of faith*, though they are such as it could not have discovered by any natural means, and such as are difficult to be conceived, or satisfactorily explained by its limited powers. If the *glorious light of the gospel* be sometimes overcast with clouds of doubt, so is the light of our *reason* too. But shall we deprive ourselves of the advantages of *either*, because those clouds cannot perhaps be entirely removed while we remain in this mortal life? Shall we obstinately and frowardly shut our eyes against *that day-spring from on high that has visited us*, because we are not as yet able to bear the full blaze of his beams? Indeed, not even in heaven itself, not in the highest state of perfection to which a finite being can ever attain, will all the counsels of Providence, all the *height* and the *depth* of the infinite wisdom of God, be ever disclosed or understood. *Faith* even then will be necessary, and there will be *mysteries* which cannot be penetrated by the most exalted archangel, and truths which cannot be known by him otherwise than from *revelation*, or believed upon any other ground of assent, than a *submissive confidence in the divine wisdom*. What then, shall man presume that his weak and narrow understanding is sufficient to guide him *into all truth*, without any need of *revelation* or *faith*? Shall he complain that *the ways of God are not like his ways* and *past his finding out*? True philosophy, as well as true Christianity, would teach us a wiser and modester part. It would teach us to be content within those bounds which God has assigned to us, *casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*. 2.

MODERN INFIDELITY CONSIDERED,

WITH RESPECT TO ITS

INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY:

IN A

S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

THE BAPTIST MEETING, CAMBRIDGE.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.—St. Paul.

*Sunt qui in fortune jam casibus, omnia ponant,
Et nullo credant mundum rectore moveri,
Natura volvente vices et lucis, et anni;
Atque ideo intrepidi quæcunque altaria tangunt.—Juv.*

By REV. ROBERT HALL, A. M.

New-York:

**PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY FOR THE DIFFUSION
OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.**

1835.



PREFACE.

THE author knows not whether it be necessary to apologise for the extraordinary length of this sermon, which so much exceeds the usual limits of public discourses; for it is only for the reader to conceive (by a fiction of the imagination, if he pleases so to consider it) that the patience of his audience indulged him with their attention during its delivery. The fact is, not being in the habit of writing his sermons, this discourse was not committed to paper till after it was delivered: so that the phraseology may probably vary, and the bulk be somewhat extended: but the substance is certainly retained.

He must crave the indulgence of the religious public for having blended so little *theology* with it. He is fully aware the chief attention of a Christian minister should be occupied in explaining the doctrines and enforcing the duties of genuine Christianity. Nor is he chargeable, he hopes, in the exercise of his public functions, with any remarkable deviation from this rule of conduct: yet he is equally convinced, excursions into other topics are sometimes both lawful and necessary. The versatility of error demands a correspondent variety in the methods of defending truth: and from whom have the public more right to expect its defence, in opposition to the encroachments of error and infidelity, than from those who profess to devote their studies and their lives to the advancement of virtue and religion? Accordingly, a multitude of publications on these subjects, equally powerful in argument and impressive in manner, have issued from divines of different persuasions, which must be allowed to have done the utmost honor, to the clerical profession. The most luminous statements of the evidences of Christianity, on historical grounds, have been made; the petulant cavils of infidels satisfactorily refuted; and their ignorance, if not put to shame, at least amply exposed: so that revelation, as far as truth and reason can prevail, is on all sides triumphant.

There is one point of view, however, in which the respective systems remain to be examined, which, though hitherto little considered, is forced upon our attention by the present conduct of our adversaries; that is, their *influence on society*. The controversy appears to have taken a new turn. The advocates of infidelity, baffled in the field of argument, though unwilling to relinquish the contest, have changed their mode of attack; and seem less disposed to impugn the authority than to supersede the use of revealed religion, by giving such representations of man and of society as are calculated to make its sanctions appear unreasonable and unnecessary. Their aim is not so much to discredit the pretensions of any particular religion as to set aside the principles common to all.

To obliterate the sense of Deity, of moral sanctions, and a future world,—and by these means to prepare the way for the total subversion

PREFACE.

of every institution, both social and religious, which men have been hitherto accustomed to revere,—is evidently the principal object of modern sceptics; the first sophists who have avowed an attempt to govern the world, without inculcating the persuasion of a superior power. It might well excite our surprise to behold an effort to shake off the yoke of religion, which was totally unknown during the prevalence of gross superstition, reserved for a period of the world, distinguished from every other by the possession of a revelation more pure, more perfect, and better authenticated than the enlightened sages of antiquity ever ventured to anticipate, were we not fully persuaded the immaculate holiness of this revelation is precisely that which renders it disgusting to men who are determined at all events to retain their vices. Our Saviour furnishes the solution:—*They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; neither will they come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved.*

While all the religions, the Jewish excepted, which, previous to the promulgation of Christianity, prevailed in the world, partly the contrivance of human policy, partly the offspring of ignorant fear, mixed with the mutilated remains of traditionary revelation, were favorable to the indulgence of some vices, and but feebly restrained the practice of others; between vice of every sort and in every degree, and the religion of Jesus, there subsists an irreconcilable enmity, an eternal discord. The dominion of Christianity being in the very essence of it the dominion of virtue, we need look no further for the sources of hostility in any who oppose it, than their attachment to vice and disorder.

This view of the controversy, if it be just, demonstrates its supreme importance; and furnishes the strongest plea with every one with whom it is not a matter of indifference whether vice or virtue, delusion or truth, governs the world, to exert his talents, in whatever proportion they are possessed, in *contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*. In such a crisis, is it not best for Christians of all denominations, that they may better concentrate their forces against the common adversary, to suspend for the present their internal disputes; imitating the policy of wise states, who have never failed to consider the invasion of an enemy as the signal for terminating the contests of party? Internal peace is the best fruit we can reap from external danger. The momentous contest at issue between the Christian church and infidels may instruct us how trivial, for the most part, are the controversies of its members with each other; and that the different ceremonies, opinions, and practices by which they are distinguished correspond to the variety of feature and complexion discernible in the offspring of the same parent, among whom there subsists the greatest family likeness. May it please God so to dispose the minds of Christians of every visible church and community, that *Ephraim may no longer vex Judah, nor Judah Ephraim*; that the only rivalry felt in future may be, who shall most advance the interests of our common Christianity; and the only provocation sustained, that of *provoking each other to love and good works!* When, at the distance of more than half a century, Christianity was assaulted by a *Woolston*, a *Tindal*, and a *Morgan*, it was ably supported, both by clergymen of the established church, and writers among Protestant dissenters. The labors of a *Clarke* and a *Butler* were associated with those of a *Doddridge*, a *Leland* and a *Lardner*, with such equal

PREFACE.

reputation and success, as to make it evident that the intrinsic excellence of religion needs not the aid of external appendages ; but that, with or without a dowry, her charms are of sufficient power to fix and engage the heart.

The writer of this discourse will feel himself happy, should his example stimulate any of his brethren of superior abilities to contribute their exertions in so good a cause. His apology for not entering more at large into the proofs of the being of a God,* and the evidences of Christianity,† is, that these subjects have been already handled with great ability by various writers : and that he wished rather to confine himself to one view of the subject—The total incompatibility of sceptical principles with the existence of society. Should his life be spared, he may probably at some future time enter into a fuller and more particular examination of the infidel philosophy, both with respect to its speculative principles and its practical effects,—its influence on society and on the individual. In the mean time he humbly consecrates this discourse to the honor of that Saviour, who, when the means of a more liberal offering are wanting, commends the widow's mite.

CAMBRIDGE, *January* 18, 1801.

* See an excellent sermon on Atheism by the Rev. Mr. Estlin, of Bristol, at whose meeting the substance of this discourse was first preached. In the sermon referred to, the argument for the existence of a Deity is stated with the utmost clearness and precision : and the sophistry of Dupuis, a French infidel, refuted in a very satisfactory manner.

† It is almost superfluous to name a work so universally known as Dr. Paley's *View of the Evidences of Christianity*, which is probably, without exception, the most clear and satisfactory statement of the historical proofs of the Christian religion ever exhibited in any age or country.

A SERMON.

EPHESIANS, ii. 12.

Without God in the world.

As the Christian ministry is established for the instruction of men, throughout every age, in truth and holiness, it must adapt itself to the ever-shifting scenes of the moral world, and stand ready to repel the attacks of impiety and error, under whatever form they may appear. The church and the world form two societies so distinct, and are governed by such opposite principles and maxims, that, as well from this contrariety as from the express warnings of Scripture, true Christians must look for a state of warfare, with this consoling assurance, that the church, like the burning bush beheld by Moses in the land of Midian, may be encompassed with flames, but will never be consumed.

When she was delivered from the persecuting power of Rome, she only experienced a change of trials. The oppression of external violence was followed by the more dangerous and insidious attacks of internal enemies. The freedom of inquiry claimed and asserted at the Reformation degenerated, in the hands of men who professed the principles without possessing the spirit of the Reformers, into a fondness for speculative refinements; and consequently into a source of dispute, faction, and heresy. While Protestants attended more to the points on which they differed than to those in which they agreed,—while more zeal was employed in settling ceremonies and defending subtleties than in enforcing plain revealed truths,—the lovely fruits of peace and charity perished under the storms of controversy.

In this disjointed and disordered state of the Christian church, they who never looked into the interior of Christianity were apt to suspect, that to a subject so fruitful in particular disputes must attach a general uncertainty; and that a religion founded on revelation could never have occasioned such discordancy of principle and practice among its disciples. Thus infidelity is the joint offspring of an irreligious temper and unholy speculation, employed, not in examining the evidences of Christianity, but in detecting the vices and imperfections of professing Christians. It has passed through various stages, each distinguished by higher gradations of impiety; for when men arrogantly abandon their guide, and wilfully shut their eyes on the light of heaven, it is wisely ordained, that their errors shall multiply at every step, until their extravagance confutes itself, and the mischief of their principles works its own antidote. That such has been the progress of infidelity will be obvious from a slight survey of its history.

Lord HERBERT, the first and purest of our English freethinkers, who flourished in the beginning of the reign of Charles the First, did not so

much impugn the doctrine or the morality of the Scriptures, as attempt to supersede their necessity, by endeavoring to show that the great principles of the unity of God, a moral government, and a future world, are taught with sufficient clearness by the light of nature. BOLINGBROKE, and some of his successors, advanced much farther, and attempted to invalidate the proofs of the moral character of the Deity, and consequently all expectations of rewards and punishments; leaving the Supreme Being no other perfections than those which belong to a first cause, or almighty contriver. After him, at a considerable distance, followed HUME, the most subtle, if not the most philosophical, of the Deists; who, by perplexing the relations of cause and effect, boldly aimed to introduce a universal scepticism, and to pour a more than Egyptian darkness into the whole region of morals. Since his time, sceptical writers have sprung up in abundance, and infidelity has allured multitudes to its standard: the young and superficial by its dexterous sophistry, the vain by the literary fame of its champions, and the profligate by the licentiousness of its principles. Atheism the most undisguised has at length begun to make its appearance.

Animated by numbers, and imboldened by success, the infidels of the present day have given a new direction to their efforts, and impressed a new character on the ever-growing mass of their impious speculations.

By uniting more closely with each other, by giving a sprinkling of irreligion to all their literary productions, they aim to engross the formation of the public mind; and, amid the warmest professions of attachment to virtue, to effect an entire disruption of morality from religion. Pretending to be the teachers of virtue and the guides of life, they propose to revolutionize the morals of mankind; to regenerate the world by a process entirely new; and to rear the temple of virtue, not merely without the aid of religion, but on the renunciation of its principles, and the derision of its sanctions. Their party has derived a great accession of numbers and strength from events the most momentous and astonishing in the political world, which have divided the sentiments of Europe between hope and terror; and which, however they may issue, have, for the present, swelled the ranks of infidelity. So rapidly, indeed, has it advanced since this crisis, that a great majority on the Continent, and in England a considerable proportion of those who pursue literature as a profession,* may justly be considered as the open or disguised abettors of atheism.

With respect to the sceptical and religious systems, the inquiry at present is not so much which is the truest in speculation, as which is the most useful in practice: or, in other words, whether morality will be best promoted by considering it as a part of a great and comprehensive law, emanating from the will of a supreme, omnipotent legislator; or as a mere expedient, adapted to our present situation, enforced by no other motives than those which arise from the prospects and interests of the present state. The absurdity of atheism having been demonstrated so often and so clearly by many eminent men that this part of the subject

* By those who pursue literature as a profession, the author would be understood to mean that numerous class of literary men who draw their principal subsistence from their writings.

is exhausted, I should hasten immediately to what I have more particularly in view, were I not apprehensive a discourse of this kind may be expected to contain some statement of the argument in proof of a Deity; which, therefore, I shall present to you in as few and plain words as possible.

When we examine a watch, or any other piece of machinery, we instantly perceive marks of design. The arrangement of its several parts, and the adaption of its movement to one result, show it to be a contrivance; nor do we ever imagine the faculty of contriving to be in the watch itself, but in a separate agent. If we turn from art to nature, we behold a vast magazine of contrivances; we see innumerable objects replete with the most exquisite design. The human eye, for example, is formed with admirable skill for the purpose of sight, the ear for the function of hearing. As in the productions of art we never think of ascribing the power of contrivance to the machine itself, so we are certain the skill displayed in the human structure is not a property of man, since he is very imperfectly acquainted with his own formation. If there be an inseparable relation between the ideas of a contrivance and a contriver, and it be evident, in regard to the human structure, the designing agent is not man himself, there must undeniably be some separate invisible being, who is his former. This great Being we mean to indicate by the appellation of Deity.

This reasoning admits but of one reply. Why, it will be said, may we not suppose the world has always continued as it is; that is, that there has been a constant succession of finite beings, appearing and disappearing on the earth from all eternity? I answer, whatever is supposed to have occasioned this constant succession, exclusive of an intelligent cause, will never account for the undeniable marks of design visible in all finite beings. Nor is the absurdity of supposing a contrivance without a contriver diminished by his imaginary succession; but rather increased, by being repeated at every step of the series.

Besides, an eternal succession of finite beings involves in it a contradiction, and is therefore plainly impossible. As the supposition is made to get quit of the idea of any one having existed from eternity, each of the beings in the succession must have begun in time: but the succession itself is eternal. We have then the succession of beings infinitely earlier than any being in the succession; or, in other words, a series of beings running on, *ad infinitum*, before it reached any particular being, which is absurd.

From these considerations it is manifest there must be some eternal Being, or nothing could ever have existed; and since the beings which we behold bear in their whole structure evident marks of wisdom and design, it is equally certain that he who formed them is a wise and intelligent agent.

To prove the unity of this great Being, in opposition to a plurality of gods, it is not necessary to have recourse to metaphysical abstractions. It is sufficient to observe, that the notion of more than one author of nature is inconsistent with that harmony of design which pervades her works; that it explains no appearances, is supported by no evidence, and serves no purpose, but to embarrass and perplex our conceptions.

Such are the proofs of the existence of that great and glorious Being

whom we denominate God ; and it is not presumption to say, it is impossible to find another truth in the whole compass of morals which, according to the justest laws of reasoning, admits of such strict and rigorous demonstration.

But I proceed to the more immediate object of this discourse, which, as has already intimated, is not so much to evince the falsehood of scepticism as a theory, as to display its mischievous effects, contrasted with those which result from the belief of a Deity and a future state. The subject, viewed in this light, may be considered under two aspects; the influence of the opposite systems on the principles of morals and on the formation of character. The first may be styled their direct, the latter their equally important, but indirect, consequence and tendency.

I. The sceptical or irreligious system subverts the whole foundation of morals. It may be assumed as a maxim, that no person can be required to act contrary to his greatest good, or his highest interest, comprehensively viewed in relation to the whole duration of his being. It is often our duty to forego our own interest *partially*, to sacrifice a smaller pleasure for the sake of a greater, to incur a present evil in pursuit of a distant good of more consequence. In a word, to arbitrate among interfering claims of inclination is the moral arithmetic of human life. But to risk the happiness of the whole duration of our being in any case whatever, were it possible, would be foolish ; because the sacrifice must, by the nature of it, be so great as to preclude the possibility of compensation.

As the present world, on sceptical principles, is the only place of recompense, whenever the practice of virtue fails to promise the greatest sum of present good,—cases which often occur in reality, and much oftener in appearance,—every motive to virtuous conduct is superseded; a deviation from rectitude becomes the part of wisdom ; and should the path of virtue, in addition to this, be obstructed by disgrace, torment, or death, to persevere would be madness and folly, and a violation of the first and most essential law of nature. Virtue, on these principles, being in numberless instances at war with self-preservation, never can, or ought to become, a fixed habit of the mind.

The system of infidelity is not only incapable of arming virtue for great and trying occasions, but leaves it unsupported in the most ordinary occurrences. In vain will its advocates appeal to a moral sense, to benevolence and sympathy ; for it is undeniable that these impulses may be overcome. In vain will they expatiate on the tranquility and pleasure attendant on a virtuous course : for though you may remind the offender that in disregarding them he has violated his nature, and that a conduct consistent with them is productive of much internal satisfaction; yet if he reply that his taste is of a different sort, that there are other gratifications which he values more, and that every man must choose his own pleasures, the argument is at an end.

Rewards and punishments, assigned by infinite power, afford a palpable and pressing motive which can never be neglected without renouncing the character of a rational creature : but tastes and relishes are not to be prescribed.

A motive in which the reason of man shall acquiesce, enforcing the practice of virtue at all times and seasons, enters into the very essence

of moral obligation. Modern infidelity supplies no such motives; it is therefore essentially and infallibly a system of enervation, turpitude, and vice.

This chasm in the construction of morals can only be supplied by the firm belief of a rewarding and avenging Deity, who binds duty and happiness, though they may seem distant, in an indissoluble chain; without which, whatever usurps the name of virtue is not a principle, but a feeling; not a determinate rule, but a fluctuating expedient, varying with the tastes of individuals, and changing with the scenes of life.

Nor is this the only way in which infidelity subverts the foundation of morals. All reasoning on morals presupposes a distinction between inclinations and duties, affections and rules. The former prompt; the latter prescribe. The former supply motives to action; the latter regulate and control it. Hence it is evident, if virtue have any just claim to authority, it must be under the latter of these notions; that is, under the character of a law. It is under this notion, *in fact*, that its dominion has ever been acknowledged to be paramount and supreme.

But, without the intervention of a superior will, it is impossible there should be any moral laws, except in the lax metaphorical sense in which we speak of the laws of matter and motion. Men being essentially equal, morality is, on these principles, only a stipulation, or silent compact, into which every individual is supposed to enter, as far as suits his convenience, and for the breach of which he is accountable to nothing but his own mind. His own mind is his law, his tribunal, and his judge!

Two consequences, the most disastrous to society, will inevitably follow the general prevalence of this system;—the frequent perpetration of great crimes, and the total absence of great virtues.

1. In those conjunctures which tempt avarice or inflame ambition, when a crime flatters with the prospect of impunity, and the certainty of immense advantage, what is to restrain an atheist from its commission? To say that remorse will deter him is absurd; for remorse, as distinguished from pity, is the sole offspring of religious belief, the extinction of which is the great purpose of the infidel philosophy.

The dread of punishment or infamy from his fellow-creatures will be an equally ineffectual barrier; because crimes are only committed under such circumstances as suggest the hope of concealment: not to say that crimes themselves will soon lose their infamy and their horror under the influence of that system which destroys the sanctity of virtue, by converting it into a low calculation of worldly interest. Here the sense of an ever-present Ruler, and of an avenging Judge, is of the most awful and indispensable necessity; as it is that alone which impresses on all crimes the character of *folly*, shows that duty and interest in every instance coincide, and that the most prosperous career of vice, the most brilliant successes of criminality, are but an *accumulation of wrath against the day of wrath*.

As the frequent perpetration of great crimes is an inevitable consequence of the diffusion of sceptical principles, so, to understand this consequence in its full extent, we must look beyond their immediate effects, and consider the disruption of social ties, the destruction of confidence, the terror, suspicion, and hatred which must prevail in that state of society in which barbarous deeds are familiar. The tranquility

which pervades a well-ordered community, and the mutual good offices which bind its members together, are founded on an implied confidence in the disposition to annoy; in the justice, humanity, and moderation of those among whom we dwell. So that the worst consequences of crimes is, that they impair the stock of public charity and general tenderness. The dread and hatred of our species would infallibly be grafted on a conviction that we were exposed every moment to the surges of an unbridled ferocity, and that nothing but the power of the magistrate stood between us and the daggers of assassins. In such a state, laws, deriving no support from public manners, are unequal to the task of curbing the fury of the passions; which, from being concentrated into selfishness, fear, and revenge, acquire new force. Terror and suspicion beget cruelty, and inflict injuries by way of prevention. Pity is extinguished in the stronger impulse of self-preservation. The tender and generous affections are crushed; and nothing is seen but the retaliation of wrongs, the fierce and unmitigated struggle for superiority. This is but a faint sketch of the incalculable calamities and horrors we must expect, should we be so unfortunate as ever to witness the triumph of modern infidelity.

2. This system is a soil as barren of great and sublime virtues as it is prolific in crimes. By great and sublime virtues are meant those which are called into action on great and trying occasions, which demand the sacrifice of the dearest interests and prospects of human life, and sometimes of life itself: the virtues, in a word, which, by their rarity and splendor, draw admiration, and have rendered illustrious the character of patriots, martyrs, and confessors. It requires but little reflection to perceive, that whatever veils a future world, and contracts the limits of existence within the present life, must tend, in a proportionable degree, to diminish the grandeur and narrow the sphere of human agency.

As well might you expect exalted sentiments of justice from a professed gamester, as look for noble principles in the man whose hopes and fears are all suspended on the present moment, and who takes the whole happiness of his being on the events of this vain and fleeting life. If he be ever impelled to the performance of great achievements in a good cause, it must be solely by the hope of fame; a motive which, besides that it makes virtue the servant of opinion, usually grows weaker at the approach of death; and which, however it may surmount the love of existence in the heat of battle, or in the moment of public observation, can seldom be expected to operate with much force on the retired duties of a private station.

In affirming that infidelity is unfavorable to the higher class of virtues, we are supported as well by facts as by reasoning. We should be sorry to load our adversaries with unmerited reproach: but to what history, to what record will they appeal for the traits of moral greatness exhibited by their disciples? Where shall we look for the trophies of infidel magnanimity of atheistical virtue? Not that we mean to accuse them of inactivity: they have recently filled the world with the fame of their exploits; exploits of a different kind indeed, but of imperishable memory, and disastrous lustre.

Though it is confessed great and splendid actions are not the ordinary employment of life, but must, from their nature, be reserved for

high and eminent occasions ; yet that system is essentially defective which leaves no room for their production. They are important, both from their immediate advantage and their remoter influence. They often save, and always illustrate, the age and nation in which they appear. They raise the standard of morals ; they arrest the progress of degeneracy ; they diffuse a lustre over the path of life : monuments of the greatness of the human soul, they present to the world the august image of virtue in her sublimest form, from which streams of light and glory issue to remote times and ages ; while their commemoration by the pen of historians and poets awaken in distant bosoms the sparks of kindred excellence.

Combine the frequent and familiar perpetration of atrocious deeds with the dearth of great and generous actions, and you have the exact picture of that condition of society which completes the degradation of the species—the frightful contrast of dwarfish virtues and gigantic vices, where every thing good is mean and little, and every thing evil is rank and luxuriant : a dead and sickening uniformity prevails, broken only at intervals by volcanic eruptions of anarchy and crime.

II. Hitherto we have considered the influence of scepticism on the principles of virtue ; and have endeavored to show that it despoils it of its dignity, and lays its authority in the dust. Its influence on the formation of character remains to be examined. The actions of men are oftener determined by their character than their interest ; their conduct takes its color more from their acquired taste, inclinations, and habits, than from a deliberate regard to their greatest good. It is only on great occasions the mind awakes to take an extended survey of her whole course, and that she suffers the dictates of reason to impress a new bias upon her movements. The actions of each day are, for the most part, links which follow each other in the chain of custom. Hence the great effort of practical wisdom is to imbue the mind with right tastes, affections, and habits ; the elements of character, and masters of action.

1. The exclusion of a Supreme Being and of a superintending Providence tends directly to the destruction of moral taste. It robs the universe of all finished and consummate excellence even in idea. The admiration of perfect wisdom and goodness for which we are formed, and which kindles such unspeakable rapture in the soul, finding in the regions of scepticism nothing to which it corresponds, droops and languishes. In a world which presents a fair spectacle of order and beauty, of a vast family nourished and supported by an Almighty Parent,—in a world which leads the devout mind, step by step, to the contemplation of the first fair and the first good, the sceptic is encompassed with nothing but obscurity, meanness, and disorder.

When we reflect on the manner in which the idea of Deity is formed, we must be convinced that such an idea, intimately present to the mind, must have a most powerful effect in refining the moral taste. Composed of the richest elements, it embraces, in the character of a beneficent Parent and Almighty Ruler, whatever is venerable in wisdom, whatever is awful in authority, whatever is touching in goodness.

Human excellence is blended with many imperfections, and seen

under many limitations. It is beheld only in detached and separate portions, nor ever appears in any one character whole and entire. So that when, in imitation of the Stoics, we wish to form out of these fragments the notion of a perfectly wise and good man, we know it is a mere fiction of the mind, without any real being in whom it is imbodied and realized. In the belief of a Deity, these conceptions are reduced to reality: the scattered rays of an ideal excellence are concentrated, and become the real attributes of that Being with whom we stand in the nearest relation, who sits supreme at the head of the universe, is armed with infinite power, and pervades all nature with his presence.

The efficacy of these views in producing and augmenting a virtuous taste will indeed be proportioned to the vividness with which they are formed, and the frequency with which they recur; yet some benefit will not fail to result from them even in their lowest degree.

The idea of the Supreme Being has this peculiar property: that, as it admits of no substitute, so, from the first moment it is formed, it is capable of continual growth and enlargement. God himself is immutable; but our conception of his character is continually receiving fresh accessions, is continually growing more extended and refulgent, by having transferred to it new elements of beauty and goodness; by attracting to itself, as a centre, whatever bears the impress of dignity, order, or happiness. It borrows splendor from all that is fair, subordinates to itself all that is great, and sits enthroned on the riches of the universe.

As the object of worship will always be, in a degree the object of imitation, hence arises a fixed standard of moral excellence; by the contemplation of which the tendencies to corruption are counteracted, the contagion of bad example is checked, and human nature rises above its natural level.

When the knowledge of God was lost in the world, just ideas of virtue and moral obligation disappeared along with it. How is it to be otherwise accounted for, that in the polished nations, and in the enlightened times of pagan antiquity, the most unnatural lusts and detestable impurities were not only tolerated in private life,* but entered into religion, and formed a material part of public worship:† while among the Jews, a people so much inferior in every other branch of knowledge, the same vices were regarded with horror?

The reason is this: the true character of God was unknown to the

* It is worthy of observation, that the elegant and philosophic Xenophon, in delineating the model of a perfect prince in the character of Cyrus, introduces a Mede who had formed an unnatural passion for his hero; and relates the incident in a lively, festive humor, without being in the least conscious of any indelicacy attached to it. What must be the state of manners in a country where a circumstance of this kind, feigned, no doubt, by way of ornament, finds a place in such a work?—*Cyri Instit.* lib. i.

“Deinde nobis, qui, *concedentibus philosophis antiquis*, adolescentulis delectamur, etiam vitia sæpe jucunda sunt.”—*Cicero De Nat. Dei*, lib. i.

† “— *Nam quo non prostat femina templo?*”—*Juv.*

The impurities practised in the worship of Isis, an Egyptian deity, rose to such a height in the reign of Tiberius, that that profligate prince thought fit to prohibit her worship, and at the same time inflicted on her priests the punishment of crucifixion.—*Joseph. Antiq. Judaic.* lib. xviii.

former, which by the light of Divine revelation was displayed to the latter. The former cast their deities in the mould of their own imaginations; in consequence of which they partook of the vices and defects of their worshippers. To the latter, no scope was left for the wanderings of fancy; but a pure and perfect model was prescribed.

False and corrupt, however, as was the religion of the pagans (if it deserves the name,) and defective, and often vicious, as was the character of their imaginary deities, it was still better for the world that the void should be filled with these than abandoned to a total scepticism; for if both systems are equally false, they are not equally pernicious.—When the fictions of heathenism consecrated the memory of its legislators and heroes, it invested them for the most part with those qualities which were in the greatest repute. They were supposed to possess in the highest degree the virtues in which it was most honorable to excel: and to be the witnesses, approvers, and patrons of those perfections in others by which their own character was chiefly distinguished. Men saw, or rather fancied they saw, in these supposed deities the qualities they most admired, dilated to a larger size, moving in a higher sphere, and associated with the power, dignity, and happiness of superior natures. With such ideal models before them, and conceiving themselves continually acting under the eye of such spectators and judges, they felt a real elevation; their eloquence became more impassioned, their patriotism inflamed, and their courage exalted.

Revelation, by displaying the true character of God, affords a pure and perfect standard of virtue; heathenism, one in many respects defective and vicious; the fashionable scepticism of the present day, which excludes the belief of all superior powers, affords no standard at all. Human nature knows nothing better or higher than itself. All above and around it being shrouded in darkness, and the prospect confined to the tame realities of life, virtue has no room upwards to expand; nor are any excursions permitted into that unseen world, the true element of the great and good, by which it is fortified with motives equally calculated to satisfy the reason, to delight the fancy, and to impress the heart.

2. Modern infidelity not only tends to corrupt the moral taste, it also promotes the growth of those vices which are the most hostile to social happiness. Of all the vices incident to human nature, the most destructive to society are vanity, ferocity, and unbridled sensuality; and these are precisely the vices which infidelity is calculated to cherish.

That the love, fear, and habitual contemplation of a Being infinitely exalted, or in other words, devotion, is adapted to promote a sober and moderate estimate of our own excellences, is incontestable; nor is it less evident that the exclusion of such sentiments must be favorable to pride. The criminality of pride will, perhaps, be less readily admitted; for though there is no vice so opposite to the spirit of Christianity, yet there is none which, even in the Christian world, has, under various pretences, been treated with so much indulgence.

There is, it will be confessed, a delicate sensibility to character, a sober desire of reputation, a wish to possess the esteem of the wise and good, felt by the purest minds, which is at the farthest remove from arrogance or vanity. The humility of a noble mind scarcely dares to approve of itself, until it has secured the approbation of others. Very

different is that restless desire of distinction, that passion for theatrical display, which inflames the heart and occupies the whole attention of vain men. This, of all the passions, is the most unsocial, avarice itself not excepted. The reason is plain. Property is a kind of good which may be more easily attained, and is capable of more minute subdivisions than fame. In the pursuit of wealth, men are led by an attention to their own interests to promote the welfare of each other; their advantages are reciprocal; the benefits which each is anxious to acquire for himself he reaps in the greatest abundance from the union and conjunction of society. The pursuits of vanity are quite contrary. The portion of time and attention mankind are willing to spare from their avocations and pleasures to devote to the admiration of each other is so small, that every successful adventurer is felt to have impaired the common stock. The success of one is the disappointment of multitudes. For though there be many rich, many virtuous, many wise men, fame must necessarily be the portion of but few. Hence every vain man, every man in whom vanity is the ruling passion, regarding his rival as his enemy, is strongly tempted to rejoice in his miscarriage, and repine at his success.

Besides, as the passions are sedom seen in a simple, unmixed state, so vanity, when it succeeds, degenerates into arrogance; when it is disappointed (and it is often disappointed), it is exasperated into malignity, and corrupted into envy. In this stage the vain man commences a determined misanthropist. He detests that excellence which he cannot reach. He detests his species, and longs to be revenged for the unpardonable injustice he has sustained in their insensibility to his merits. He lives upon the calamities of the world; the vices and miseries of men are his element and his food. Virtues, talents, and genius are his natural enemies, which he persecutes with instinctive eagerness and unrelenting hostility. There are who doubt the existence of such a disposition; but it certainly issues out of the dregs of disappointed vanity: a disease which taints and vitiates the whole character wherever it prevails. It forms the heart to such a profound indifference to the welfare of others, that, whatever appearances he may assume, or however wide the circle of his seeming virtues may extend, you will infallibly find the vain man is his own centre. Attentive only to himself, absorbed in the contemplation of his own perfections, instead of feeling tenderness for his fellow-creatures as members of the same family, as beings with whom he is appointed to act, to suffer, and to sympathize,—he considers life as a stage on which he is performing a part, and mankind in no other light than spectators. Whether he smiles or frowns, whether his path is adorned with the rays of beneficence, or his steps are dyed in blood, an attention to self is the spring of every movement, and the motive to which every action is referred.

His apparent good qualities lose all their worth, by losing all that is simple, genuine, and natural: they are even pressed into the service of vanity, and become the means of enlarging its power. The truly good man is jealous over himself lest the notoriety of his best actions, by blending itself with their motive, should diminish their value; the vain man performs the same actions for the sake of that notoriety. The good man quietly discharges his duty, and shuns ostentation; the vain man considers every good deed lost that is not publicly displayed. The

one is intent upon realities, the other upon semblances : the one aims to *be* virtuous, the other to *appear* so.

Nor is a mind inflated with vanity more disqualified for right action than just speculation, or better disposed to the pursuit of truth than the practice of virtue. To such a mind the simplicity of truth is disgusting. Careless of the improvement of mankind, and intent only upon astonishing with the appearance of novelty, the glare of paradox will be preferred to the light of truth ; opinions will be embraced, not because they are just, but because they are new : the more flagitious, the more subversive of morals, the more alarming to the wise and good, the more welcome to men who estimate their literary powers by the mischief they produce, and who consider the anxiety and terror they impress as the measure of their renown. Truth is simple and uniform, while error may be infinitely varied : and as it is one thing to start paradoxes, and another to make discoveries, we need the less wonder at the prodigious increase of modern philosophers.

We have been so much accustomed to consider extravagant self-estimation merely as a *ridiculous* quality, that many will be surprised to find it treated as a vice pregnant with serious mischief to society. But, to form a judgment of its influence on the manners and happiness of a nation, it is necessary only to look at its effects in a family ; for bodies of men are only collections of individuals, and the greatest nation is nothing more than an aggregate of a number of families. Conceive of a domestic circle, in which each member is elated with a most extravagant opinion of himself, and a proportionable contempt of every other ; is full of little contrivances to catch applause, and whenever he is not praised is sullen and disappointed. What a picture of disunion, disgust, and animosity would such a family present ! How utterly would domestic affection be extinguished, and all the purposes of domestic society be defeated ! The general prevalence of such dispositions must be accompanied by an equal proportion of general misery. The tendency of pride to produce strife and hatred is sufficiently apparent from the pains men have been at to construct a system of politeness, which is nothing more than a sort of mimic humility, in which the sentiments of an offensive self-estimation are so far disguised and suppressed as to make them compatible with the spirit of society ; such a mode of behavior as would naturally result from an attention to the apostolic injunction : *Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory ; but, lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.* But if the semblance be of such importance, how much more useful the reality ! If the mere garb of humility be of such indispensable necessity that without it society could not subsist, how much better still would the harmony of the world be preserved, were the condescension, deference, and respect so studiously displayed a true picture of the heart !

The same restless and eager vanity which disturbs a family, when it is permitted in a great national crisis to mingle with political affairs, distracts a kingdom ; infusing into those intrusted with the enactment of laws a spirit of rash innovation and daring empiricism, a disdain of the established usages of mankind, a foolish desire to dazzle the world with new and untried systems of policy, in which the precedents of antiquity and the experience of ages are only consulted to be trodden under foot ; and into the executive department of government, a fierce con-

tention for pre-eminence, an incessant struggle to supplant and destroy, with a propensity to calumny and suspicion, proscription and massacre.

We shall suffer the most eventful season ever witnessed in the affair of men to pass over our heads to very little purpose, if we fail to learn from it some awful lessons on the nature and progress of the passions. The true light in which the French revolution ought to be contemplated is that of a grand experiment on human nature. Among the various passions which that revolution has so strikingly displayed, none is more conspicuous than vanity; nor is it less difficult, without adverting to the national character of the people, to account for its extraordinary predominance. Political power, the most seducing object of ambition, never before circulated through so many hands; the prospect of possessing it was never before presented to so many minds. Multitudes, who, by their birth and education, and not unfrequently by their talents, seemed destined to perpetual obscurity, were by the alternate rise and fall of parties elevated into distinction, and shared in the functions of government. The short-lived forms of power and office glided with such rapidity through successive ranks of degradation, from the court to the very dregs of the populace, that they seemed rather to solicit acceptance than to be a prize contended for.* Yet, as it was still impossible for all to possess authority, though none were willing to obey, a general impatience to break the ranks and rush into the foremost ground maddened and infuriated the nation, and overwhelmed law, order, and civilization, with the violence of a torrent.

If such be the mischiefs both in public and private life resulting from an excessive self-estimation, it remains next to be considered whether Providence has supplied any medicine to correct it; for as the reflection on excellences, whether real or imaginary, is always attended with pleasure to the possessor, it is a disease deeply seated in our nature.

Suppose there was a great and glorious Being always present with us, who had given us existence, with numberless other blessings, and on whom we depended each instant, as well for every present enjoyment as for every future good; suppose, again, we had incurred the just displeasure of such a Being by ingratitude and disobedience, yet that in great mercy he had not cast us off, but had assured us he was willing to pardon and restore us on our humble entreaty and sincere repentance; say, would not an habitual sense of the presence of this Being, self-reproach for having displeased him, and an anxiety to recover his favor, be the most effectual antidote to pride? But such are the leading discoveries made by the Christian revelation, and such the dispositions which a practical belief of it inspires.

Humility is the first fruit of religion. In the mouth of our Lord there is no maxim so frequent as the following: *Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* Religion, and that alone, teaches *absolute* humility; by which I mean a sense of our *absolute* nothingness in the view of infinite greatness and excellence. That sense of inferiority which results from the comparison of men with each other is often an unwelcome sentiment forced upon the mind, which may rather embitter the temper than soften it: that which

* — “Æquo pulseat pede pauperum tabernas
Regumque turres.”—*Hor.*

devotion impresses is soothing and delightful. The devout man loves to lie low at the footstool of his Creator, because it is then he attains the most lively perceptions of the Divine excellence, and the most tranquil confidence in the Divine favor. In so august a presence he sees all distinctions lost, and all beings reduced to the same level. He looks at his superiors without envy, and his inferiors without contempt: and when from this elevation he descends to mix in society, the conviction of superiority which must in many instances be felt is a calm inference of the understanding and no longer a busy, importunate passion of the heart.

The wicked (says the Psalmist) through the pride of their countenance will not seek after God: God is not in all their thoughts. When we consider the incredible vanity of the atheistical sect, together with the settled malignity and unrelenting rancor with which they pursue every vestige of religion, is it uncandid to suppose that its humbling tendency is one principal cause of their enmity; that they are eager to displace a Deity from the minds of men, that they may occupy the void; to crumble the throne of the Eternal into dust, that they may elevate themselves on its ruins; and that, as their licentiousness is impatient of restraint, so their pride disdains a superior?

We mentioned a ferocity of character as one effect of sceptical impiety. It is an inconvenience attending a controversy with those with whom we have few principles in common, that we are often in danger of reasoning inconclusively, for the want of its being clearly known and settled what our opponents admit, and what they deny. The persons, for example, with whom we are at present engaged have discarded humility and modesty from the catalogue of virtues; on which account we have employed the more time in evincing their importance: but whatever may be thought of humility as a *virtue*, it surely will not be denied that inhumanity is a most detestable *vice*; a vice, however, which scepticism has a most powerful tendency to inflame.

As we have already shown that pride hardens the heart, and that religion is the only effectual antidote, the connexion between irreligion and inhumanity is in this view obvious. But there is another light in which this part of the subject may be viewed, in my humble opinion, much more important though seldom adverted to. The supposition that man is a moral and accountable being, destined to survive the stroke of death, and to live in a future world in a never-ending state of happiness or misery, makes him a creature of incomparably more *consequence* than the opposite supposition. When we consider him as placed here by an Almighty Ruler in a state of probation, and that the present life is his period of trial, the first link in a vast and interminable chain which stretches into eternity, he assumes a dignified character in our eyes. Every thing which relates to him becomes interesting; and to trifle with his happiness is felt to be the most unpardonable levity. If such be the destination of man, it is evident that in the qualities which fit him for it his principal dignity consists: his moral greatness is his true greatness. Let the sceptical principles be admitted, which represent him, on the contrary, as the offspring of chance, connected with no superior power, and sinking into annihilation at death, and he is a contemptible creature, whose existence and happiness are insignificant. The characteristic difference is lost between him and the brute creation,

from which he is no longer distinguished, except by the vividness and multiplicity of his perceptions.

If we reflect on that part of our nature which disposes us to humanity, we shall find, that where we have no particular attachment our sympathy with the sufferings and concern for the destruction of sensitive beings are in proportion to their supposed importance in the general scale; or, in other words, to their supposed capacity of enjoyment. We feel, for example, much more at witnessing the destruction of a man than of an inferior animal, because we consider it as involving the extinction of a much greater sum of happiness. For the same reason he who would shudder at the slaughter of a large animal will see a thousand insects perish without a pang. Our sympathy with the calamities of our fellow-creatures is adjusted to the same proportions; for we feel more powerfully affected with the distresses of fallen greatness than with equal or greater distresses sustained by persons of inferior rank; because, having been accustomed to associate with an elevated station the idea of superior happiness, the loss appears the greater, and the wreck more extensive. But the disproportion in importance between man and the meanest insect is not so great as that which subsists between man considered as *mortal* and as *immortal*; that is, between man as he is represented by the system of scepticism, and that of divine revelation: for the enjoyment of the meanest insect bears some proportion, though a very small one, to the present happiness of man; but the happiness of time bears none at all to that of eternity. The sceptical system, therefore, sinks the importance of human existence to an inconceivable degree.

From these principles results the following important inference—that to extinguish human life by the hand of violence must be quite a different thing in the eyes of a sceptic from what it is in those of a Christian. With the sceptic it is nothing more than diverting the course of a little red fluid called blood; it is merely lessening the number by one of many millions of fugitive contemptible creatures. The Christian sees in the same event an accountable being cut off from a state of probation, and hurried, perhaps unprepared, into the presence of his Judge, to hear that final, that irrevocable sentence, which is to fix him for ever in an unalterable condition of felicity or woe. The former perceives in death nothing but its physical circumstances; the latter is impressed with the magnitude of its moral consequences. It is the moral relation which man is supposed to bear to a superior power, the awful idea of accountability, the influence which his present disposition and actions are conceived to have upon his eternal destiny, more than any superiority of intellectual powers abstracted from these considerations, which invest him with such mysterious grandeur, and constitute the firmest guard on the sanctuary of human life. This reasoning, it is true serves more *immediately* to show how the disbelief of a future state endangers the security of life; but though this be its *direct* consequence, it extends by analogy much further, since he who has learned to sport with the *lives* of his fellow-creatures will feel but little solicitude for their welfare in any other instance; but, as the greater includes the less will easily pass from this to all the inferior gradations of barbarity.

As the advantage of the armed over the unarmed is not seen till the moment of attack, so in that tranquil state of society in which law and order maintain their ascendancy, it is not perceived, perhaps not even

suspected, to what an alarming degree the principles of modern infidelity leave us naked and defenceless. But let the state be convulsed, let the mounds of regular authority be once overflowed, and the still small voice of law drowned in the tempest of popular fury (events which recent experience shows to be possible), it will then be seen that atheism is a school of ferocity; and that, having taught its disciples to consider mankind as little better than a nest of insects, they will be prepared in the fierce conflicts of party to trample upon them without pity, and extinguish them without remorse.

It was late* before the atheism of Epicurus gained footing at Rome; but its prevalence was soon followed by such scenes of proscription confiscation, and blood, as were *then* unparalleled in the history of the world; from which the republic being never able to recover itself, after many unsuccessful struggles, exchanged liberty for repose, by submission to absolute power. Such were the effects of atheism at Rome. An attempt has been recently made to establish a similar system in France, the consequences of which are too well known to render it requisite for me to shock your feelings by a recital. The only doubt that can arise is, whether the barbarities which have stained the revolution in that unhappy country are justly chargeable on the prevalence of atheism. Let those who doubt of this recollect that the men who, by their activity and talents, prepared the minds of the people for that great change—*Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot, Rousseau*, and others—were avowed enemies of revelation; that in all their writings the diffusion of scepticism and revolutionary principles went hand in hand; that the fury of the most sanguinary parties was especially pointed against the Christian priesthood and religious institutions, without once pretending, like other persecutors, to execute the vengeance of God (whose name they never mentioned) upon his enemies; that their atrocities were committed with wanton levity and brutal merriment; that the reign of atheism was avowedly and expressly the reign of terror; that in the full madness of their career, in the highest climax of their horrors, they shut up the temples of God, abolished his worship, and proclaimed death to be an eternal sleep; as if by pointing to the silence of the sepulchre, and the sleep of the dead, these ferocious barbarians meant to apologize for saving neither sleep, quiet, nor repose to the living.

As the heathens fabled that Minerva issued full armed from the head of Jupiter, so no sooner were the speculations of atheistical philosophy matured, than they gave birth to a ferocity which converted the most polished people in Europe into a horde of assassins; the seat of voluptuous refinement, of pleasure, and of arts, into a theatre of blood.

Having already shown that the principles of infidelity facilitate the commission of crimes, by removing the restraints of fear; and that they foster the arrogance of the individual, while they inculcate the most despicable opinion of the species; the inevitable result is, that a haughty self-confidence, a contempt of mankind, together with a daring defiance of religious restraints, are the natural ingredients of the atheistical character; nor is it less evident that these are, of all others, the dispositions which most forcibly stimulate to violence and cruelty.

* "Neque enim assentior iis qui hæc nuper disserere cœperunt, cum corporibus nul animos interire atque omnia morte deleri."—*Cicero de Amicitia*.

Settle it therefore in your minds, as a maxim never to be effaced or forgotten, that atheism is an inhuman, bloody, ferocious system, equally hostile to every useful restraint and to every virtuous affection; that, leaving nothing above us to excite awe, nor round us to awaken tenderness, it wages war with heaven and with earth; its first object is to dethrone God, its next to destroy man.*

There is a third vice, not less destructive to society than either of those which have been already mentioned, to which the system of modern infidelity is favorable; that is, unbridled sensuality, the licentious and unrestrained indulgence of those passions which are essential to the continuation of the species. The magnitude of these passions, and their supreme importance to the existence as well as the peace and welfare of society, have rendered it one of the first objects of solicitude with every wise legislator to restrain them by such laws, and to confine their indulgence within such limits, as shall best promote the great ends for which they were implanted.

The benevolence and wisdom of the Author of Christianity are eminently conspicuous in the laws he has enacted on this branch of morals; for, while he authorizes marriage, he restrains the vagrancy and caprice of the passions, by forbidding polygamy and divorce; and, well knowing that offences against the laws of chastity usually spring from an ill-regulated imagination, he inculcates purity of heart. Among innumerable benefits which the world has derived from the Christian religion, a superior refinement in the sexual sentiments, a more equal and respectful treatment of women, greater dignity and permanence conferred on the institution of marriage, are not the least considerable; in consequence of which the purest affections and the most sacred duties are grafted on the stock of the strongest instincts.

The aim of all the leading champions of infidelity is to rob mankind of these benefits, and throw them back into a state of gross and brutal sensuality. In this spirit Mr. HUME represents the private conduct of the profligate CHARLES, whose debaucheries polluted the age, as a just subject of panegyric. A disciple in the same school has lately had the unblushing effrontery to stigmatize marriage as the worst of all monopolies; and, in a narrative of his licentious amours, to make a formal apology for departing from his principles, by submitting to its restraints. The popular productions on the Continent which issue from the atheistical school are incessantly directed to the same purpose.

Under every possible aspect in which infidelity can be viewed, it extends the dominion of sensuality: it repeals and abrogates every law by which Divine revelation has, under such awful sanctions, restrained the indulgence of the passions. The disbelief of a Supreme, Omniscient Being, which it inculcates, releases its disciples from an attention to the *heart*, from every care but the preservation of outward decorum; and the exclusion of the devout affections and an unseen world leaves the mind immersed in visible, sensible objects.

* As human nature is the same in all ages, it is not surprising to find the same moral systems, even in the most dissimilar circumstances, produce corresponding effects. Josephus remarks that the Sadducees, a kind of Jewish infidels, whose tenets were the denial of a moral government and a future state, were distinguished from the other sects by their ferocity.—*De Bell. Jud.* lib. ii. He elsewhere remarks, that they were eminent for their inhumanity in their judicial capacity.

There are two sorts of pleasures,—corporeal and mental. Though we are indebted to the senses for all our perceptions *originally*, yet those which are at the farthest remove from their *immediate impressions* confer the most elevation on the character, since in proportion as they are multiplied and augmented, the slavish subjection to the senses is subdued. Hence the true and only antidote to debasing sensuality is the possession of a fund of that *kind of enjoyment* which is independent of the corporeal appetites. Inferior in the perfection of several of his senses to different parts of the brute creation, the superiority of man over them all consists in his superior power of multiplying by new combinations his mental perceptions, and thereby of creating to himself resources of happiness separate from external sensation. In the scale of enjoyment, at the first remove from sense are the pleasures of reason and society; at the next are the pleasures of devotion and religion. The former, though totally distinct from those of sense, are yet less perfectly adapted to moderate their excesses than the last, as they are in a great measure conversant with visible and sensible objects. The religious affections and sentiments are, in fact, and were intended to be, the *proper antagonist* of sensuality,—the great deliverer from the thralldom of the appetites, by opening a spiritual world, and inspiring hopes and fears, and consolations and joys, which bears no relation to the material and sensible universe. The criminal indulgence of sensual passions admits but of two modes of prevention; the establishment of such laws and maxims in society as shall render lewd profligacy impracticable or infamous, or the infusion of such principles and habits as shall render it distasteful. Human legislatures have encountered the disease in the first, the truths and sanctions of revealed religion in the last of these methods: to both of which the advocates of modern infidelity are equally hostile.

So much has been said by many able writers to evince the inconceivable benefit of the marriage institution, that to hear it seriously attacked by men who style themselves philosophers, at the close of the eighteenth century, must awaken indignation and surprise. The object of this discourse leads us to direct our attention particularly to the influence of this institution on the *civilization* of the world.

From the records of revelation we learn that marriage, or the *permanent union* of the sexes, was ordained by God, and existed, under different modifications, in the early infancy of mankind, without which they could never have emerged from barbarism. For, conceive only what eternal discord, jealousy, and violence would ensue, were the objects of the tenderest affections secured to their possessor by no law or tie of moral obligation: were domestic enjoyments disturbed by incessant fear, and licentiousness inflamed by hope. Who could find sufficient tranquillity of mind to enable him to plan or execute any continued scheme of action, or what room for arts and sciences, or religion, or virtue, in that state in which the chief earthly happiness was exposed to every lawless invader; where one was racked with an incessant anxiety to keep what the other was equally eager to acquire? It is not probable in itself, independent of the light of scripture, that the benevolent Author of the human race ever placed them in so wretched a condition at first: it is certain they could not remain in it long without being exterminated. Marriage, by shutting out these evils, and enabling

every man to rest secure in his enjoyments, is the great civilizer of the world: with this security the mind is at liberty to expand in generous affections, and has leisure to look abroad, and engage in the pursuits of knowledge, science, and virtue.

Nor is it in this way only that marriage institutions are essential to the welfare of mankind. They are sources of tenderness, as well as the guardians of peace. Without the permanent union of the sexes there can be no permanent families: the dissolution of nuptial ties involves the dissolution of domestic society. But domestic society is the seminary of social affections, the cradle of sensibility, where the first elements are acquired of that tenderness and humanity which cement mankind together; and were they entirely extinguished, the whole fabric of social institutions would be dissolved.

Families are so many centres of attraction, which preserve mankind from being scattered and dissipated by the repulsive powers of selfishness. The order of nature is evermore from particulars to generals. As in the operations of intellect we proceed from the contemplation of individuals to the formation of general abstractions, so in the development of the passions, in like manner, we advance from private to public affections; from the love of parents, brothers, and sisters, to those more expanded regards which embrace the immense society of human kind.*

In order to render men benevolent, they must first be made tender: for benevolent affections are not the offspring of reasoning; they result from that culture of the heart, from those early impressions of tenderness, gratitude, and sympathy, which the endearments of domestic life are sure to supply, and for the formation of which it is the best possible school.

The advocates of infidelity invert this eternal order of nature. Instead of inculcating the private affections, as a discipline by which the mind is prepared for those of a more public nature, they set them in direct opposition to each other, they propose to build general benevolence on the destruction of individual tenderness, and make us love the whole species more by loving every particular part of it less. In pursuit of this chimerical project, gratitude, humility, conjugal, parental, and filial affection, together with every other social disposition, are reprobated—virtue is limited to a passionate attachment to the general good. Is it not natural to ask, when all the tenderness of life is extinguished, and all the bands of society are untwisted, from whence this ardent affection for the general good is to spring?

When this savage philosophy has completed its work, when it has taught its disciple to look with perfect indifference on the offspring of his body and the wife of his bosom, to estrange himself from his friends, insult his benefactors, and silence the pleadings of gratitude and pity; will he, by thus divesting himself of all that is human, be better prepared for the disinterested love of his species? Will he become a philanthropist only because he has ceased to be a man? Rather, in this total ex-

* "Arctior vero colligatio est societatis propinquorum: ab illa enim immensa societate humani generis, in exiguum angustumque concluditur. Nam cum sit hoc natura commune animantium, ut habeant lubidinem procreandi, prima societas in ipso conjugio est; proxima in liberis; deinde una domus, communia omnia. Id autem est principium urbis, et quasi seminarium reipublicæ."—*Cic. de Off. lib. i. cap. 17.*

emption from all the feelings which humanize and soften, in this chilling frost of universal indifference, may we not be certain that selfishness unmingled and uncontrolled will assume the empire of his heart; and that under pretence of advancing the general good, an object to which the fancy may give innumerable shapes, he will be prepared for the violation of every duty, and the perpetration of every crime? Extended benevolence is the last and most perfect fruit of the private affections; so that to expect to reap the former from the extinction of the latter is to oppose the means to the end; is as absurd as to attempt to reach the summit of the highest mountain without passing through the intermediate spaces, or to hope to attain the heights of science by forgetting the first elements of knowledge. These absurdities have sprung, however, in the advocates of infidelity, from an ignorance of human nature sufficient to disgrace even those who did not style themselves philosophers. Presuming, contrary to the experience of every moment, that the affections are awakened by *reasoning*, and perceiving that the general good is an incomparably greater object *in itself* than the happiness of any limited number of individuals, they inferred nothing more was necessary than to exhibit it in its just dimensions, to draw the *affections* towards it; as though the fact of the superior populousness of China to Great Britain needed but to be known to render us indifferent to our domestic concerns, and lead us to direct all our anxiety to the prosperity of that vast but remote empire.

It is not the province of reason to awaken new passions, or open new sources of sensibility: but to direct us in the attainment of those objects which nature has already rendered pleasing, or to determine among the interfering inclinations and passions which sway the mind, which are the fittest to be preferred.

Is a regard to the general good then, you will reply, to be excluded from the motives of action? Nothing is more remote from my intention: but as the nature of this motive has, in my opinion, been much misunderstood by some good men, and abused by others of a different description to the worst of purposes, permit me to declare, in a few words, what appears to me to be the truth on this subject.

The welfare of the whole system of being must be allowed to be, *in itself* the object of all others the most worthy of being pursued; so that, could the mind distinctly embrace it, and discern at every step *what action* would infallibly promote it, we should be furnished with a sure criterion of right and wrong, an unerring guide, which would supersede the use and necessity of all inferior rules, laws, and principles.

But this being impossible, since the good of the *whole* is a motive so loose and indeterminate, and embraces such an infinity of relations, that before we could be certain what action it prescribed, the season of action would be past; to weak, short-sighted mortals Providence has assigned a sphere of agency less grand and extensive indeed, but better suited to their limited powers, by implanting certain *affections* which it is their duty to cultivate, and suggesting particular rules to which they are bound to conform. By these provisions the boundaries of virtue are easily ascertained, at the same time that its ultimate object, the good of the whole, is secured; for, since the happiness of the entire system results from the happiness of the several parts, the affections, which

confine the attention *immediately* to the latter, conspire in the end to the promotion of the former; as the laborer, whose industry is limited to a corner of a large building, performs his part towards rearing the structure much more effectually than if he extended his care to the whole;

As the interest, however, of any limited number of persons may not only contribute, but may possibly be directly opposed to the general good (the interest of a family, for example, to that of a province, or of a nation to that of the world), Providence has so ordered it, that in a well-regulated mind there springs up, as we have already seen, besides particular attachments, *an extended regard to the species*, whose office is twofold: not to *destroy* and *extinguish* the more private affections, which is mental parricide; but first, as far as is consistent with the claims of those who are immediately committed to our care, *to do good to all men*; secondly, to exercise a jurisdiction and control over the private affections, so as to prohibit their indulgence whenever it would be attended with *manifest detriment* to the whole. Thus every part of our nature is brought into action; all the practical principles of the human heart find an element to move in, each in its different sort and manner conspiring, without mutual collisions, to maintain the harmony of the world and the happiness of the universe.*

* It is somewhat singular, that many of the fashionable infidels have hit upon a definition of virtue which perfectly coincides with that of certain metaphysical divines in America, first invented and defended by that most acute reasoner, *Jonathan Edwards*. They both place virtue exclusively in a passion for the general good; or, as Mr. Edwards expresses it, *love to being in general*; so that our love is always to be proportioned to the magnitude of its object in the scale of being, which is liable to the objections I have already stated, as well as to many others which the limits of this note will not permit me to enumerate. Let it suffice to remark, (1.) That virtue, on these principles, is an utter impossibility: for the system of being, comprehending the great Supreme, is *infinite*: and, therefore, to maintain the proper proportion, the force of particular attachment must be infinitely less than the passion for the general good; but the limits of the human mind are not capable of any emotion so infinitely different in degree. (2.) Since *our views* of the extent of the universe are capable of perpetual enlargement, admitting the sum of existence is ever the same, we must return back at each step to diminish the strength of particular affections, or they will become disproportionate; and consequently, on these principles, vicious; so that the balance must be continually fluctuating, by the weights being taken out of one scale and put into the other. (3.) If virtue consist *exclusively* in love to being in general, or attachment to the general good, the particular affections are, to every purpose of virtue, useless, and even pernicious; for their immediate, nay, their necessary tendency is to attract to their objects a proportion of attention which far exceeds their comparative value in the general scale. To allege that the *general good* is promoted by them will be of no advantage to the defence of this system, but the contrary, by confessing that a greater sum of happiness is attained by a deviation from, than an adherence to, its principles; unless its advocates mean by the love of being in general the same thing as the private affections, which is to confound all the distinctions of language, as well as all the operations of mind. Let it be remembered, we have no dispute respecting what is the ultimate end of virtue, which is allowed on both sides to be the greatest sum of happiness in the universe. The question is merely, what is *virtue itself*? or, in other words, what are the means appointed for the attainment of that end?

There is little doubt, from some parts of Mr. Godwin's work entitled "Political Justice," as well as from his early habits of reading, that he was indebted to Mr. Edwards for his principal arguments against the private affections; though, with a daring consistence, he has pursued his principles to an extreme from which that most excellent man would have revolted with horror. The fundamental error of the whole system arose, as I conceive, from a mistaken pursuit of simplicity: from a wish to construct a moral system, without leaving sufficient scope for the infinite variety of

Before I close this discourse, I cannot omit to mention three circumstances attending the propagation of infidelity by its present abettors, equally new and alarming.

1. It is the first attempt which has been ever witnessed, on an extensive scale, to establish the *principles of atheism*; the first effort which history has recorded to disannul and extinguish the belief of all superior powers: the consequence of which, should it succeed, would be to place mankind in a situation never before experienced 'not even during the ages of pagan darkness. The system of polytheism was as remote from modern infidelity as from true religion. Amid that rubbish of superstition, the product of fear, ignorance, and vice, which had been accumulating for ages, some faint embers of sacred truth remained unextinguished: the interposition of unseen powers in the affairs of men was believed and revered, the sanctity of oaths was maintained, the idea of *revelation* and of *tradition* as a source of religious knowledge was familiar; a useful persuasion of the existence of a future world was kept alive, and the greater gods were looked up to as the guardians of the public welfare, the patrons of those virtues which promote the prosperity of states, and the avenger of injustice, perfidy, and fraud.*

moral phenomena and mental combination; in consequence of which its advocates were induced to place virtue *exclusively* in some *one disposition* of mind: and, since the passion for the general good is undeniably the *noblest* and most extensive of all others, when it was once resolved to place virtue in any *one thing*, there remained little room to hesitate which should be preferred. It might have been worth while to reflect, that in the natural world there are two kinds of attraction; one which holds the several *parts* of individual bodies in contact; another, which maintains the union of bodies themselves with the general system: and that, though the union in the former case is much more *intimate* than in the latter, each is equally essential to the order of the world. Similar to this is the relation which the public and private affections bear to each other, and their use in the moral system.

* The testimony of Polybius to the beneficial effects which resulted from the system of pagan superstition, in fortifying the sentiments of moral obligation, and supporting the sanctity of oaths, is so weighty and decisive, that it would be an injustice to the subject not to insert it; more especially as it is impossible to attribute it to the influence of credulity on the author himself, who was evidently a sceptic. It is scarcely necessary to remark, that all the benefits which might in any way flow from superstition, are secured to an incomparably greater degree by the belief of true religion.

"But among all the useful institutions," says Polybius, "that demonstrate the superior excellence of the Roman government, the most considerable, perhaps, is the opinion which people are taught to hold concerning the gods: and that which other men regard as an object of disgrace appears, in my judgment, to be the very thing by which this republic is chiefly sustained. I mean superstition, which is impressed with all its terrors, and influences the private actions of the citizens and the public administration of the state, to a degree that can scarcely be exceeded.

"The ancients, therefore, acted not absurdly, nor without good reason, when they inculcated the notions concerning the gods, and the belief of infernal punishments; but much rather are those of the present age to be charged with rashness and absurdity, in endeavoring to extirpate these opinions; for, not to mention other effects that flow from such an institution, if among the Greeks, for example, a single talent only be intrusted to those who have the management of any of the public money, though they give ten written sureties, with as many seals, and twice as many witnesses, they are unable to discharge the trust reposed in them with integrity. But the Romans, on the other hand, who in the course of their magistracies and in embassies disburse the greatest sums, are prevailed on by the single obligation of an oath to perform their duty with inviolable honesty. And as in other states a man is rarely to be found whose hands are pure from public robbery, so among the Romans it is no less rare to discover one that is tainted with this crime."—*Hampton's Polybius*, vol. iii. book vi.

Though the system of paganism is justly condemned by reason and scripture, yet

Of whatever benefit superstition might formerly be productive, by the scattered particles of truth which it contained, these advantages can now only be reaped from the soil of true religion; nor is there any other alternative left than the belief of Christianity, or absolute atheism. In the revolutions of the human mind, exploded *opinions* are often revived; but an exploded superstition never recovers its credit. The pretensions to Divine revelation is so august and commanding, that when its falsehood is once discerned, it is covered with all the ignominy of detected imposture; it falls from such a height (to change the figure) that it is inevitably crumbled into atoms. Religions, whether false or true, are not creatures of arbitrary institution. After discrediting the principles of piety, should our modern freethinkers find it necessary, in order to restrain the excesses of ferocity, to seek for a substitute in some popular superstition, it will prove a vain and impracticable attempt: they may recall the names, restore the altars, and revive the ceremonies: but to rekindle the spirit of heathenism will exceed their power; because it is impossible to enact ignorance by law, or to repeal by legislative authority the dictates of reason and the light of science.

2. The efforts of infidels to diffuse the principles of infidelity among the common people is another alarming symptom peculiar to the present time. HUME, BOLINGBROKE, and GIBBON addressed themselves solely to the more polished classes of the community, and would have thought their refined speculations debased by an attempt to enlist disciples from among the populace. Infidelity has lately grown condescending; bred in the speculations of a daring philosophy, immured at first in the cloisters of the learned, and afterwards nursed in the lap of voluptuousness and of courts; having at length reached its full maturity, it boldly ventures to challenge the suffrages of the people, solicits the acquaintance of peasants and mechanics, and seeks to draw whole nations to its standard.

It is not difficult to account for this new state of things. While infidelity was rare, it was employed as the instrument of literary vanity; its wide diffusion having disqualified it for answering that purpose, it is now adopted as the organ of political convulsion. Literary distinction is conferred by the approbation of a few; but the total subversion of society demands the concurrence of millions.

3. The infidels of the present day are the first sophists who have presumed to innovate in the very *substance* of morals. The disputes on moral questions hitherto agitated among philosophers have respected the

it assumed as true several principles of the first importance to the preservation of public manners; such as a persuasion of invisible power, of the folly of incurring the Divine vengeance for the attainment of any present advantage, and the Divine approbation of virtue: so that, strictly speaking, it was the mixture of truth in it which gave it all its utility, which is well stated by the *great and judicious* Hooker in treating on this subject. "Seeing, therefore, it doth thus appear," says that venerable author, "that the safety of all states dependeth upon religion: that religion, unfeignedly loved, perfecteth men's abilities unto all kinds of virtuous services in the commonwealth; that men's desire is, in general, to hold no religion but the true; and that whatever good effects do grow out of their religion, who embrace, instead of the true, a false, the roots thereof are certain sparks of the light of truth intermingled with the darkness of error; because no religion can wholly and only consist of untruths, we have reason to think that all true virtues are to honor *true religion* as their parent, and all well-ordered commonwealths to love her as their chiefest stay."—*Eccles. Pol.* book v.

grounds of duty, not the nature of duty itself; or they have been merely metaphysical, and related to the history of moral sentiments in the mind, the sources and principles from which they were most easily deduced; they never turned on the quality of those dispositions and actions which were denominated virtuous. In the firm persuasion that the love and fear of the Supreme Being, the sacred observation of promises and oaths, reverence to magistrates, obedience to parents, gratitude to benefactors, conjugal fidelity, and parental tenderness were primary virtues, and the chief support of every commonwealth, they were unanimous. The curse denounced upon such as remove ancient landmarks, upon those who call good evil, and evil good, put light for darkness, and darkness for light, who employ their faculties to subvert the eternal distinctions of right and wrong, and thus to poison the streams of virtue at their source, falls with accumulated weight on the advocates of modern infidelity, and on them alone.

Permit me to close this discourse with a few serious reflections. There is much, it must be confessed, in the apostacy of multitudes, and the rapid progress of infidelity, to awaken our fears for the virtue of the rising generation; but nothing to shake our faith,—nothing which Scripture itself does not give us room to expect. The features which compose the character of apostates, their profaneness, presumption, lewdness, impatience of subordination, restless appetite for change, vain pretensions to freedom and to emancipate the world, while themselves are the slaves of lust, the weapons with which they attack Christianity, and the snares they spread for the unwary, are depicted in the clearest colors by the pencil of prophecy: *Knowing this first (says Peter), that there shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts.* In the same epistle he more fully describes the persons he alludes to; as chiefly them which walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government; presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities; sporting themselves in their own deceivings, having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: for when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error; while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption.†* Of the same character Jude admonishes us to remember *that they were foretold as mockers who should be in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they (he adds) who separate themselves (by apostacy), sensual, not having the Spirit.* Infidelity is an evil of short duration. “*It has (as a judicious writer observes), no individual subsistence given it in the system of prophecy. It is not a BEAST,—but a mere putrid excrescence of the papal beast: an excrescence which, though it may diffuse death through every vein of the body on which it grew, yet shall die along with it.*”‡ Its enormities will hasten its overthrow. It is impossible that a system which, by villifying every virtue, and embracing the patronage of almost every vice and crime, wages war with all the order and civilization of the world; which, equal to the establishment of nothing, is armed only with the energies of destruction, can long retain an ascendancy. It is in no

* 2 Pet. iii. 3.

† 2 Pet. ii. 10, &c.

‡ See an excellent work by the Rev. Andrew Fuller, entitled “The Gospel its own Witness.”

shape formed for perpetuity. Sudden in its rise and impetuous in its progress ; it resembles a mountain torrent, which is loud, filthy, and desolating ; but being fed by no perennial spring, is soon drained off and disappears. By permitting to a certain extent the prevalence of infidelity, Providence is preparing new triumphs for religion. In asserting its authority, the preachers of the Gospel have hitherto found it necessary to weigh the prospects of immortality against the interests of time ; to strip the world of its charms, to insist on the deceitfulness of pleasure, the unsatisfying nature of riches, the emptiness of grandeur, and the nothingness of a mere worldly life. Topics of this nature will always have their use ; but it is not by such representations alone that the importance of religion is evinced. The prevalence of impiety has armed us with new weapons in its defence.

Religion being primarily intended to make men *wise unto salvation*, the support it ministers to social order, the stability it confers on government and laws, is a *subordinate species* of advantage which we should have continued to enjoy, without reflecting on its cause, but for the development of deistical principles, and the experiment which has been made of their effects in a neighboring country. It had been the constant boast of infidels, that their system, more liberal and generous than Christianity, needed but to be tried to produce an immense accession to human happiness ; and Christian nations, careless and supine, retaining little of religion but the profession, and disgusted with its restraints, lent a favorable ear to these pretensions. God permitted the trial to be made. In one country, and that the centre of Christendom, revelation underwent a total eclipse,* while atheism, performing on a darkened theatre its strange and fearful tragedy, confounded the first elements of society, blended every age, rank, and sex in indiscriminate proscription and massacre, and convulsed all Europe to its centre ; that the imperishable memorial of these events might teach the last generations of mankind to consider religion as the pillar of society, the safeguard of nations, the parent of social order, which alone has power to curb the fury of the passions, and secure to every one his rights ; to the laborious the reward of their industry, to the rich the enjoyment of their wealth, to nobles the preservation of their honors, and to princes the stability of their thrones.

We might ask the patrons of infidelity what fury impels them to attempt the subversion of Christianity ? Is it that they have discovered a better system ? To what virtues are their principles favorable ? Or is there one which Christians have not carried to a higher perfection than any of which their party can boast ? Have they discovered a more excellent rule of life, or a better hope in death, than that which the Scriptures suggest ? Above all, what are the pretensions on which they rest their claims to be the guides of mankind ; or which imbolden them to expect we should trample upon the experience of ages, and abandon a religion which has been attested by a train of miracles and prophecies, in which millions of our forefathers have found a refuge in every trouble, and

* It is worthy of attention that Mercier, a warm advocate of the French Revolution, and a professed Deist, in his recent work entitled "New Paris," acknowledges and laments the extinction of religion in France. "*We have*," says he, "*in proscribing superstition, destroyed all religious sentiment ; but this is not the way to regenerate the world.*"—See Appendix to the 30th vol. Monthly Review.

consolation in the hour of death ; a religion which has been adorned with the highest sanctity of character and splendor of talents, which enrols among its disciples the names of BACON, NEWTON, and LOCKE, the glory of their species, and to which these illustrious men were proud to dedicate the last and best fruits of their immortal genius ?

If the question at issue is to be decided by argument, nothing can be added to the triumph of Christianity ; if by an appeal to authority, what have our adversaries to oppose to these great names ? Where are the infidels of such pure, uncontaminated morals, unshaken probity, and extended benevolence, that we should be in danger of being seduced into impiety by their example ? Into what obscure recesses of misery, into what dungeons have their philanthropists penetrated, to lighten the fetters and relieve the sorrows of the helpless captive. What barbarous tribes have their apostles visited ; what distant climes have *they* explored, encompassed with cold, nakedness, and want, to diffuse principles of virtue, and the blessings of civilization ? Or will they rather choose to waive their pretensions to this extraordinary and in their eyes, eccentric species of benevolence (for infidels, we know, are sworn enemies to enthusiasm of every sort), and rest their character on their political exploits,—on their efforts to reanimate the virtue of a sinking state, to restrain licentiousness, to calm the tumult of popular fury, and by inculcating the spirit of justice, moderation, and pity for fallen greatness, to mitigate the inevitable horrors of revolution ? our adversaries will at least have the discretion, if not the modesty, to recede from the test.

More than all, their infatuated eagerness, their parricidal zeal to extinguish a sense of Deity must excite astonishment and horror. Is the idea of an almighty and perfect Ruler unfriendly to any passion which is consistent with innocence, or any obstruction to any design which it is not shameful to avow ? Eternal God, on what are thine enemies intent ! What are those enterprizes of guilt and horror, that, for the safety of their performers, require to be enveloped in a darkness which the eye of Heaven must not pierce ! Miserable men ! Proud of being the offspring of chance ; in love with universal disorder ; whose happiness is involved in the belief of there being no witness to their designs, and who are at ease only because they suppose themselves inhabitants of a forsaken and fatherless world !

Having been led by the nature of the subject to consider chiefly the manner in which sceptical impiety affects the welfare of states, it is the more requisite to warn you against that most fatal mistake of regarding religion as an engine of policy ; and to recall to your recollection that the concern we have in it is much more as *individuals* than as *collective bodies*, and far less temporal than eternal. The happiness which it confers in the present life comprehends the blessings which it scatters by the way in its march to immortality. That future condition of being which it ascertains, and for which its promises and truths are meant to prepare us, is the ultimate end of human societies, the final scope and object of present existence ; in comparison of which all the revolutions of nations and all the vicissitudes of time are light and transitory. *Godliness has, it is true, the promise of the life that now is ; but chiefly of that which is to come.* Other acquisitions may be requisite to make men great ; but, be assured, the religion of Jesus is alone sufficient to make them good and happy. Powerful sources of consolation in sor-

row, unshaken fortitude amid the changes and perturbations of the world, humility remote from meanness, and dignity unstained by pride, contentment in every station, passions pure and calm, with habitual serenity, the full enjoyment of life, undisturbed by the dread dissolution or the fear of an hereafter, are its invaluable gifts. To these enjoyments, however, you will necessarily continue strangers, unless you resign yourselves wholly to its power; for the consolations of religion are reserved to reward, to sweeten, and to stimulate obedience. Many without renouncing the profession of Christianity, without formally rejecting its distinguishing doctrines, live in such an habitual violation of its laws and contradiction to its spirit, that, conscious they have more to fear than to hope from its truth, they are never able to contemplate it without terror. It haunts their imagination, instead of tranquilizing their hearts, and hangs with depressing weight on all their enjoyments and pursuits. Their religion, instead of comforting them under their troubles, is itself their greatest trouble, from which they seek refuge in the dissipation and vanity of the world, until the throbs and tumults of conscience force them back upon religion. Thus suspended between opposite powers, the sport of contradictory influences, they are disqualified for the happiness of both worlds; and neither enjoy the pleasures of sin nor the peace of piety. Is it surprising to find a mind thus bewildered in uncertainty, and dissatisfied with itself, courting deception, and embracing with eagerness every pretext to mutilate the claims and enervate the authority of Christianity; forgetting that it is of the very essence of the religious principle to preside and control, and that it is impossible to *serve God and mammon*? It is this class of professors who are chiefly in danger of being entangled in the snares of infidelity.

The champions of infidelity have much more reason to be ashamed than to boast of such converts. For what can be a stronger presumption of the falsehood of a system, than that it is the opiate of a restless conscience; that it prevails with minds of a certain description, not because they find it true, but because they feel it necessary; and that in adopting it they consult less with their reason than with their vices and their fears? It requires but little sagacity to foresee that speculations which originate in guilt must end in ruin. Infidels are not themselves satisfied with the truth of their system; for had they any settled assurance of its principles, in consequence of calm dispassionate investigation, they would never disturb the quiet of the world by their attempts to proselyte; but would lament their own infelicity, in not being able to perceive sufficient evidence for the truth of religion, which furnishes such incentives to virtue, and inspires such exalted hopes. Having nothing to substitute in the place of religion, it is absurd to suppose that, in opposition to the collective voice of every country, age, and time proclaiming its necessity, solicitude for the welfare of mankind impels them to destroy it.

To very different motives must their conduct be imputed. More like conspirators than philosophers, in spite of the darkness with which they endeavor to surround themselves, some rays of unwelcome conviction will penetrate, some secret apprehensions that all is not right will make themselves felt, which they find nothing so effectual to quell as an attempt to enlist fresh disciples, who, in exchange for new principles, impart confidence and diminish fear. For the same reason it is seldom

they attack Christianity by argument: their favorite weapons are ridicule, obscenity, and blasphemy; as the most miserable outcasts of society are, of all men, found most to delight in vulgar merriment and senseless riot.

JESUS CHRIST seems to have *his fan in his hand to be thoroughly urging his floor*; and nominal Christians will probably be scattered like chaff. But has real Christianity any thing to fear? Have not the degenerate manners and corrupt lives of multitudes in the visible church been, on the contrary, the principal occasion of scandal and offence? Infidelity, without intending it, is gradually removing this reproach: possessing the property of attracting to itself the morbid humors which pervade the church, until the Christian profession, on the one hand, is reduced to a sound and healthy state, and scepticism, on the other, exhibits nothing but a mass of putridity and disease.

In a view of the final issue of the contest, we should find little cause to lament the astonishing prevalence of infidelity, but for a solicitude in the rising generation, to whom its principles are recommended by two motives, with young minds the most persuasive,—the love of independence, and the love of pleasure. With respect to the first, we could earnestly entreat the young to remember that, by the unanimous consent of all ages, modesty, docility, and reverence to superior years, and to parents above all, have been considered as their *appropriate virtues*, a guard assigned by the immutable laws of God and nature on the inexperience of youth; and with respect to the second, that Christianity prohibits no pleasures that are innocent, lays no restraints that are capricious; but that the sobriety and purity which it enjoins, by strengthening the intellectual powers, and preserving the faculties of mind and body in undiminished vigor, lay the surest foundation of present peace and future eminence. At such a season as this, it becomes an urgent duty on parents, guardians, and tutors to watch, not only over the morals, but the principles of those committed to their care; to make it appear that a concern for their eternal welfare is their chief concern; and to imbue them early with that knowledge of the evidences of Christianity, and that profound reverence for the Scriptures, that, with the blessing of God (which, with submission, they may then expect), *may keep them from this hour of temptation that has come upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth.*

To an attentive observer of the signs of the times, it will appear one of the most extraordinary phenomena of this eventful crisis, that, amidst the ravages of atheism and infidelity, real religion is evidently on the increase. *The kingdom of God, we know, cometh not with observation*; yet still there are not wanting manifest tokens of its approach. The personal appearance of the Son of God was announced by the shaking of nations; his spiritual kingdom, in all probability, will be established in the midst of similar convulsions and disorders. The blasphemous impiety of the enemies of God, as well as the zealous efforts of his sincere worshippers, will doubtless be overruled to accomplish the purposes of his unerring providence: while, in inflicting the chastisements on the offended Deity on corrupt communities and nations, infidelity marks progress by devastation and ruin, by the prostration of thrones and the conquest of kingdoms; thus appalling the inhabitants of the world, and compelling them to take refuge in the church of God, the true sanc-

tuary ; the stream of 'divine knowledge, unobserved, is flowing in new channels, winding its course among humble valleys, refreshing thirsty deserts, and enriching with far other and higher blessings than those of commerce the most distant climes and nations, until, agreeably to the prediction of prophecy, the *knowledge of the Lord shall fill and cover the whole earth.*

Within the limits of this discourse it would be impracticable to exhibit the evidences of Christianity ; nor is it my design : but there is one consideration, resulting immediately from my text, which is entitled to great weight with all who believe in the one living and true God as the sole object of worship. The Ephesians, in common with other Gentiles, are described in the text as being, previous to their conversion, *without God in the world* ; that is, without any just and solid acquaintance with his character, destitute of the knowledge of his will, the institutes of his worship, and the hopes of his favor ; to the truth of which representation, whoever possesses the slightest acquaintance with pagan antiquity must assent. Nor is it a fact less incontestable, that, while human philosophy was never able to abolish idolatry in a single village, the promulgation of the gospel overthrew it in a great part (and that the most enlightened) of the world. If our belief in the unity and perfections of God, together with his moral government and exclusive right to the worship of mankind, be founded in truth, they cannot reasonably be denied to be truths of the first importance, and infinitely to outweigh the greatest discoveries in science ; because they turn the hopes, fears, and interests of man into a totally different channel from that in which they must otherwise flow. Wherever these principles are admitted, there a new dominion is erected, and a new system of laws established.

But since all events are under divine direction, is it reasonable to suppose that the great Parent, after suffering his creatures to continue for ages ignorant of his true character, should at length, in the course of his Providence, fix upon falsehood, and that alone, as the effectual method of making himself known ; and that, what the virtuous exercise of reason in the best and wisest men was never permitted to accomplish, he should confer on fraud and delusion the honor of effecting ? It ill comports with the majesty of truth or the character of God, to believe that he has built the noblest superstructure on the weakest foundation ; or reduced mankind to the miserable alternative either of remaining destitute of the knowledge of himself, or of deriving it from the polluted source of impious imposture. We therefore feel ourselves justified, on this occasion, in adopting the triumphant boast of the great apostle : *Where is the wise, where is the scribe, where is the disputer of this world ? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

NOTE TO PAGE 397.

The fury of the most sanguinary parties was especially pointed against the Christian priesthood, &c.—The author finds he has given great offence to some friends whom he highly esteems, by applying the term *Christian priesthood* to the popish clergy. He begs leave to make a remark or two by way of apology.

1. It is admitted by all candid Protestants that salvation is attainable in the Roman Catholic church; but he should be glad to be informed what part of the Christian covenant entitles us to expect the salvation of those (where the gospel is promulgated) who are not even a branch of the visible church of Christ. The papistical tenets are either *fundamentally* erroneous, on which supposition it is certain no papist can be saved; or their errors must be consistent with Christian faith, and, consequently, cannot be a valid reason for excluding those who maintain them from being a part (a most corrupt part, if you please, but still a part) of the Christian church.

2. The popish clergy were persecuted under the *character of Christians*, not under the notion of heretics or schismatics. They who were the subjects of persecution were certainly the best judges of its aim and direction; and when the Archbishop of Paris and others endeavored to screen themselves from its effects by a recantation, what did they recant? Was it popery? No; but the profession of christianity. These apostates, doubtless, meant to remove the ground of offence, which, in their opinion, was the Christian profession. If the soundest ecclesiastical historians have not refused the honors of martyrdom to such as suffered in the cause of truth among the Gnostics, it ill becomes the liberality of the present age to contemplate with sullen indifference, or malicious joy, the sufferings of conscientious Catholics.

3. At the period to which the author refers, Christian worship of *every kind* was prohibited; while, in solemn mockery of religion, adoration was paid to a strumpet, under the title of the Goddess of Reason. Is it necessary to prove that men who were thus abandoned must be hostile to true religion under every form? Or, if there be any gradations in their abhorrence, to that most which is the most pure and perfect? Are atheism and obscenity more congenial to the Protestant than to the popish profession? To have incurred the hatred of the ruling party of France at the season alluded to is an honor which the author would be sorry to resign, as the exclusive boast of the church of Rome. To have been the object of the partiality of such bloody and inhuman monsters would have been a stain upon Protestants which the virtue of ages could not obliterate.



A RATIONAL INQUIRY
INTO THE
PRINCIPLES
OF THE
MODERN DEISTS;

OR,

NATURAL RELIGION INSUFFICIENT, AND
REVEALED NECESSARY, TO MAN'S HAPPINESS
IN HIS PRESENT STATE.

BY THE LATE REVEREND
MR. THOMAS HALYBURTON,
PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS.

A scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him
at understandeth.—PROV. xiv. 6.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God,
whether I speak of myself.—JOHN vii. 17.

*Solis nosse Deos & cæli numina vobis,
Aut solis nescire, datum.*—LUCAN. DE DRUID.

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INTRODUCTION.

IN this sceptical age, which questions almost every thing, it is still owned as certain, that *all men must die*. If there were any place for disputing this, there are not a few, who would spare no pains to bring themselves into the disbelief of a truth, that gives them so much disturbance, in the courses they love and seem resolved to follow: but the case is so clear, and the evidence of this principle so pregnant, which is every day confirmed by new experiments, that the most resolved infidel is forced, when it comes in his way, though unwillingly, to give his assent, and moan out an *Amen*. The *grave is the house appointed for all the living*. Some arrive sooner, some later; but all come there at length. The obscurity of the meanest cannot hide him, nor the power of the greatest screen him from the impartial hand of death, the executioner of fate, if I may be allowed the use of a word so much abused. As its coming is placed beyond doubt, so its aspect is hideous beyond the reach of thought, the force of expression, or the utmost efforts of the finest pencil in the most artful hand. It, in a moment, dashes down a fabric, which has more of curious contrivance than all the celebrated pieces put together, which the most refined human wits have invented, even when carried to the greatest height, which the improvement of so many subsequent generations, after the utmost of application and diligence, could bring them to. It puts a stop to many thousand motions, which, though strangely diversified, did all concur, with wondrous exactness, to maintain, and carry on the design and intendment of the glorious and Divine Artificer. How this Divine and wonderful machine was first erected, set a going, and has, for so long a tract of time, regularly performed all its motions, could never yet be understood by the most elevated understandings. *Canst thou tell how the bones grow in the womb of her that is with child*, is a challenge to all the sons of art, to unfold the mystery? Many have accepted it, but all have been foiled. Something they could say: but, in spite of it all, the thing they found a mystery, they left so still. How can one then look on the dissolution of so admirable a contrivance, a machine so curious, and so far surpassing human art, without the deepest and most sensible regret. It untwists that mysterious tie, whereby soul and body were so fast linked together; breaks up that intimate and close correspondence, that entire sympathy which was founded thereon; dislodges an old inhabitant; and while it lingers, being unwilling to remove, death pulls that curious fabric, wherein it dwelt, down about its ears, and so forces it thence, to take up its lodging, it can scarce tell where. And upon its removal, that curious fabric, that a little before was full of life, activity, vigor, order, warmth, and every thing else that is pleasant, is now left a dead, unactive, cold lump, or disordered mass of loathsome matter, full of stench and corruption. Now the body is a spectacle so hideous, that they who loved, and who embraced it before,



cannot abide the sight or smell of it ; but shut it up in a coffin, and not content with that, away they carry it and lodge it amongst worms, and the vilest insects in the bowels of the earth, to be consumed, devoured, torn and rent by the most abominable vermin that lodge in the grave.

*Quantum mutatus ab illo.**

We have all heard of the afflictions of Job. Two or three messengers arrive, each after another, and still the last is worst. Every one tells a story. The first is sad ; but its still more melancholy that follows. The disaster is so terrible, that it fills the world with just astonishment. And yet after all, what is this to death, which alone is able to furnish subject, more than enough, for some thousands of such melancholy messages ! One might bring the dying man the melancholy tidings, that he is divested of all his beneficial, pleasant, and honorable employments : While he is yet speaking, another might be ready to bid him denude himself of all his possessions : A third, to continue the tragedy, might assure him that there is a commission issued out to an impartial hand, to tear him from the embraces of his dear relations, without regarding the hideous outcries of a loving wife, the meltings of tender infants, the intercessions of dear friends : while others continuing still the mournful scene, might assure him that he was no more to relish the fragrancy of the spring, or taste the delights of the sons of men, or see the pleasant light of the sun, or hear the charming airs of music, or the yet more useful converse of friends. And to make the matter sadder still, if it can well be so, the story might be shut up with a rueful account of the parting of soul and body, with all the horrible disasters that follow upon this parting.

Thus the case evidently stands. Not a title of all this admits of debate. To every man it may be said, *De te fabula narratur.*† What a wonder is it, that so grave and important a subject is so little in the thoughts of men ? What apology can be made for the folly of mankind, who are at so much pains to shelter themselves against lesser inconveniences, quite overlooking this, that is of infinitely greater consequence ?

Here is the light side of death, which every body may see. What a rueful and astonishing prospect doth it give us ? Where shall we find comfort against that dismal day, whereon all this shall be verified in us ? He is something worse than a fool or a madman, that will not look to this. And he is yet more mad that thinks, that rational comfort in such a case can be maintained upon dark, slender and conjectural grounds.

It is certain, that which must support, must be something on the other side of time. The one side of death affords nothing but matter of terror ; if we are not enabled to look forward, and get such a sight of the other as may balance it, we may reasonably say, that it had been better for us never to have been.

Undoubtedly, therefore, no question is so useful, so necessary, so noble, and truly worthy the mind of man as this—What shall become of me after death ? What have I to look for on the other side of that awful change ?

Those arts and sciences which exercise the industry and consideration

* How greatly changed from what it once was.

† It is of you that the story is told.

of the greater part of the thinking world, are calculated for time, and aim at the pleasure or advantage of a present life. It is religion alone that directly concerns itself in the important question last mentioned, and pretends to offer comforts against the melancholy aspect of death, by securing us in an up-making for our losses on the other side of time.—Men, who are not blind to their own interest, had need therefore to take care of the choice of their religion. If they neglect it altogether, as many now do, they forfeit all prospect of relief. If they choose a wrong one, that is not able to reach the end, they are no less unhappy. The world may call them *wits*, or what else they please, who either wholly neglect and laugh over all inquiries after religion, or who superficially look into matters of this nature, and pass a hasty judgment: but sober reason will look on them as *somewhat below the condition of the beasts that perish*.

It is much to be regretted, that the bulk of mankind found their principles, as well as practice and hopes, on no better bottom than education, which gives but too just occasion for the smart reflection of the witty, though profane poet—

By education most have been misled;
So they believe, because they were so bred.
The priest continues what the nurse began:
And thus the child imposes on the man.*

Most part seek no better reason for their belief and practice than custom and education. Whatever those offer in principle, they greedily swallow down, and venture all on so weak a bottom. And this sure is one of the greatest reasons why so many miscarry in this important matter. It is true, in this inquiring age, many, especially of the better quality, scorn this way. But it is to be feared that the greater part of them, flying on extremes, as is common in such cases, have fallen into another and a worse one, if not to themselves, yet certainly of more pernicious consequence to the public. They set up for *wits* and *men of sense*. They pretend to have found out great mistakes in the principles of their education, the religion of their country; and thereon, without more ado, reject it in bulk, and turn sceptics in religion. And yet after all this noise, most of them neither understand the religion they reject, nor know they what to substitute in its room, which is certainly an error of the worst consequence imaginable to the public; since men once arrived at this pass, can never be depended on. Men may talk what they please. A man of no religion is a man not to be bound, and therefore is absolutely unmeet for any share in a society, which cannot subsist, if the sacred ties of of religion hold it not together.

But whatever course such persons, on the one hand or other steer, the more considerate and better part of mankind, in matters of so high importance, will, with the nicest care, try all, that they may *hold fast what is good*. If a man once understands the importance of the case, he will find reason to look some deeper, and think more seriously of this matter, than either the *unthinking generality*, who receive all in bulk, without trial, as it is given them, or, the forward *would-be-wits*, that oftentimes are guilty of as great, and much more pernicious credulity in rejecting all, as the other in receiving all.

* Hind and Panther.

But whereas there is so many different *religions* in the world, and all of them pretend to conduct us in this important inquiry ; which of them shall we choose ? The deists, to drive us into their religion, which consists only of five articles, agreed to, as they pretend, by all the world, would bear us in hand, that a choice is impossible to be made of any particular religion, till we have gone through, with such a particular examination of every pretender, and all things that can be said for or against it, as no man is able to make. *Blount* tells us, as *Herbert* before had done, that "unless a man read all authors, speak with all learned men, and know all languages, it is impossible to come to a clear solution of all doubts."* And so in effect, it is pretended impossible to be satisfied about the truth of any particular religion. If this reasoning did hold, I should not doubt to make it appear, that no truth whatsoever is to be received ; and in particular, that their, so much boasted *Catholic Religion*, cannot rationally be entertained by any man. If we can be satisfied upon rational grounds about no truth, till we have heard and considered all, that not only has been said, but may be alleged against it ; what truth can we believe ? Here it is easy to observe that some cannot do, unless they overdo. The intendment of such reasoning is obvious : some men would cast us loose as to all religion, that we may be brought under a necessity to take up with any fancy they shall be pleased to offer us ; a man that is sinking will take hold of the most tender twig. The papists have vigorously pursued this course in opposition to the Protestants, to drive them into the arms of their *infallible guide*. And indeed the learned *Herbert's* reasonings on this point, after whom the modern deists do but copy, seem to be borrowed from the Romanists, and are urged upon a design not unfavorable to the church of Rome, of which perhaps more afterwards.

But to wave this thin sophisiry ; any one that will, with a suitable application, engage in the consideration of what religion he is to choose, will quickly find himself eased of this unmanageable task, which the deists would set him. His inquiry will soon be brought to a narrow compass, and the pretenders, that will require any nice consideration, will be found very few.

For, a very overly consideration of the *religion in the heathen world*, will give any considerate mind ground enough to rest fully assured, that the desired satisfaction as to future happiness, and the means of attaining it, are not thence to be expected. Here he will not find what may have the least appearance of satisfying. The wisest of the heathens scarce ever pretended to satisfy themselves, much less others, upon these heads. All things here are dark, vain, incoherent, inconsistent, wild, and plainly ridiculous for most part ; as will further appear in our progress. Their religions were, generally speaking, calculated for other purposes, and looked not so far as eternity.

Nor will it be more difficult to get over any stop that the religion of *Mahomet* may lay in our inquirer's way. Let a man seriously peruse the *Alcoran*, and if he has his senses about him, he cannot but there see the most pregnant evidences of the grossest, most scandalous and impudent imposture, that ever was obtruded upon the world. Here he must expect no other evidence for what he is to believe, but the bare assertion

* *Blount's Religio Laici*, p. 91. *Herbert's Religio Laici*, p. 12.

of one, who was scandalously impious to that degree, that his own followers know not how to apologize for him. If you inquire for any other evidence, you are doomed by the Alcoran to everlasting ruin, and his slaves are ordered to destroy you.* He forbids any inquiry into his religion, or the grounds of it, and therefore you must either admit in bulk the entire bundle of fopperies, inconsistencies, and shocking absurdities, that are cast together in the Alcoran, without any trial, or reject all: and in this case no wise man will find it hard to make a choice.

After one has proceeded thus far, he may easily see, that he is now inevitably cast upon one of four conclusions: either 1st, He must conclude it certain that *all religion is in vain*, that there is nothing to be expected after this life, and so commence atheist. Or 2dly, He must conclude, that *certainty is not attainable in these things*; and so prove *sceptic*. Or 3dly, He must pretend, that every one's *reason unassisted is able to conduct him in matters of religion*, ascertain him of future happiness, and direct as to the means of attaining it; and so set up for *natural religion*, and turn *deist*. Or 4thly, He must acquiesce in the *revealed religion* contained in the Scriptures, and so turn *Christian*, or at least *Jew*.

As to the first of these courses, no man will go into it, till he has abandoned reason. An atheist is a monster in nature. That there is nothing to be expected after this life, and that man's soul dies with his body, is a desperate conclusion, *which ruins the foundation of all human happiness*; even in the judgment of the deists themselves.* There are two material exceptions which are sufficient to deter any thinking man from closing with it.

The one is, the *hideousness of its aspect*. Annihilation is so horrible to human nature, and has so frightful a visage to men who have a desire of perpetuity, inlaid in their very frame, that none can look at it seriously without the utmost dread. It is true, guilty atheists would fain take sanctuary here; yet were they brought to think seriously of the case, they would not find that relief in it which they project. I have been credibly informed, that a gentleman of no contemptible parts, who had lived as if indeed he were to fear or hope nothing after time, being in prison, and fearing death, (though he escaped it and yet lives) fell a thinking, when alone, of *annihilation*: and the fears of it had so deep and horrible impression on his mind, that he professed to a gentleman, who made him a visit in prison, and found him in a grievous damp, that the thought of annihilation was so dreadful to him, that he had rather think of a thousand years in hell. Guilty sinners, to ease their consciences, and screen them from the disquieting apprehensions of an *after reckoning*, retreat to this, as a refuge; but they think no more about it, save only this and that in an overly way, that it will free them from the punishment they dread and deserve. But if they would sedately view it, and take under their consideration all the horrors of the case, their natures would recoil and shrink: it would create uneasiness instead of quiet, and increase the strait rather than relieve them from it.

Besides, which is the other exception against it, were there never so much comfort in it, as there is none, *yet it is impossible to prove that*

* Alcoran, chap. 4.

† Letter to a Deist, p. 125.

there is nothing after this life. There is nothing that is tolerable can be said for it. None shall ever evince the certainty of the soul's dying with the body, till he has overthrown the *being of a God*, which can never be done so long as there is any thing certain among men. Further, as there is little or nothing to be said for it, so there is much to be said against it. Reason affords violent presumptions, at least, for a future state. And all the arguments, which conclude for the truth of Christianity, join their united force to support the certainty of a state after this life. Till these are removed out of the way, there is no access for any to enjoy the imaginary comfort of this supposition. But who will undertake solidly to overturn so many arguments, which have stood the test of ages? They who are likely to be most forward, and favor this cause most, dare scarce allow these reasonings a fair hearing, which plead for a future state, for fear of rivetting the impression of the truth deeper on their minds, which they desire to shake themselves loose of. And how then will they overthrow them? In fine, he is a madman, who will go into a conclusion, whereof he can never be certain, and wherein, were it sure, he can have no satisfaction. The first forbids the *judgment*, the last dissuades the *will* and *affections* from resting in it.

As to the second conclusion abovementioned, that sets up for *scepticism* in matters of religion, and bids us live at peradventures as to what is to be feared or hoped after time; it is a course that nothing can justify save absolute necessity. It lies open to the worst of inconveniences. Nothing can be imagined more melancholy than its consequences, and the pretences for it are vain and frivolous.

If it is really thus, that man can arrive at no certainty in matters of religion, and about his state after time, how deplorable is man's condition? His case is comfortless beyond what can well be conceived.—Nor can his enjoyments afford him any solid satisfaction, while ghostly death looks him in the face, and the sword hangs over his head, supported by a hair. Will not the prospect of this rueful change (of whose dismal attendants we have given some account) imbitter his sweetest enjoyments? And will not the horror of the case be much increased by resolving upon a perplexing uncertainty as to what may come after? In how dismal a plight is the poor man, who on the one hand is certain of the speedy arrival of death with all its frightful attendants; and on the other, is told that he must rove in uncertainty, till the event clear him, whether he shall be entirely annihilated, and so plunge into that horrible gulf where atheists seek sanctuary! or if he shall not be hurried headlong into these endless torments, which the consciences of guilty sinners, when awakened, presage; or, if he shall soar aloft into regions of endless bliss, which sinful mortals have but little reason to expect; or finally, whether he is not to launch out into some state reducible to none of these. If here we behove to fix, one would not know how to evite two conclusions that are horrible to think of: "That our reason, whereby we are capable of foreseeing, and are affected with things at a distance, is a heavy curse; and that the profligate atheist, who endeavors to mend this fault, in his constitution, by a *continual debauch*, that never allows him to think any more of what is certainly to come, than if he were a brute incapable of forethought, is the wisest man."

Beside, as was above insinuated, the pretences for this course are vain. It is true, most of those who set up for *wits* in this unhappy age,

are mere sceptics in religion, who admit nothing as certain, but boldly question every thing, and live at peradventures. Yet we are not obliged to think that this scepticism is the result of a serious inquiry, and the want of certainty thereon; but those gentlemen's way of living is inconsistent with serious religion; they are therefore desirous to have such a set of principles as may, if not favor them in the practices they have a mind to follow, yet not incommode them sore. This principle gives not absolute security of impunity; but it *seems*, and *but seems*, to justify them in a present neglect of religion, and gives them a *may be* for an escape from feared and deserved punishments; and favors that laziness that cannot search for truth, where it lies not open to the eye, even of those who care not to see it. Their practice and course of life shew them so impatient of restraints, that they love *liberty* or rather *licentiousness*; and are not willing to come under any bonds. They greedily grasp at any difficulty that seems to make never so little against religion; an evidence that they bear it no real good-will. They neither converse much with books, nor men, that may afford them satisfaction, in reference to their real scruples, which is proof enough they design not to be satisfied. They are light and jocular in their converse about the most serious matters; an evidence that their design is not to be informed. It is a good observation of the wise man, (Prov. xiv. 6.) *A scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy to him that understandeth.* This is the real mystery of the matter with those gentlemen, whatever they may pretend.

I know they want not pretences, taking enough with the unthinking, whereby they would justify themselves in their infidelity. The principal one is, that they find it easy to load religion with abundance of difficulties, not easily, if at all, capable of solution. But after all, these gentlemen use those objections as the sceptics did of old, not so much to maintain any settled principle, no not their beloved one, whereof now we speak; as to create them work, and make them sport with those who would seriously confute them, and to ward off blows from themselves, who have neither principles nor practice capable of a rational defence.

It is like indeed, that sometimes they may meet with such, who although they own religion, are yet incapable of defending it against such objections. But this is no wonder, since there are weak men of all persuasions. And their weakness is, or ought, not to be any real prejudice to the truth they maintain. Besides, every one may know that ignorance of any subject is fertile of doubts, and will start abundance of difficulties; whereas it requires a more full and exact acquaintance with the nature of things to solve them; and this falls not to every one's share.

Further, if this be allowed a reasonable exception against religion, that it is liable to exceptions not easy to be solved, it will hold as well good against all other sorts of knowledge, as against religion; yea, and I may add, it concludes much stronger; for the farther any subject is above our reach, the less reason we have to expect, that we shall be capable of solving every difficulty that may be started against it. There is no part of our knowledge, that is not incumbered with difficulties, as hard to be satisfyingly solved, as those commonly urged against religion. If this be a sufficient reason to question religion, that there are argu-

ments which may be urged against it, not capable of a fair, or, at least, an easy solution; I doubt not, upon the same ground, to bring the gentlemen who maintain this, if they will follow out their principle, to reject the most evident truths, that we receive upon the credit of moral, metaphysical, and mathematical demonstrations; yea, or even upon the testimony of our senses. For I know few of these truths that we receive upon any of those grounds, against which a person of a very ordinary spirit may not start difficulties, which perhaps no man alive can give a fair account of; and yet no man is so foolish as to call in question those truths, because he cannot solve the difficulties which every idle head may start upon those subjects. I may give innumerable instances of the difficulties wherewith other parts of human knowledge are embarrassed: I shall only hint a at few.

That matter is divisible into, or at least consists of indivisible points, is with some a truth next to self-evident. That the quite contrary is true, and matter is divisible in *infinitum*, appears no less certain to many others.* But if either of them should pretend themselves capable of solving the difficulties, that lie against their respective opinions, it were sufficient to make all men of sense and learning doubt of their capacity and judgment: For the difficulties on both hands are such, that no ingenuous man that understands them, will pretend himself capable of giving a fair solution of those, which press that side of the question he is inclined to.

Again, whether we will, or will not, we must believe one side, and but one side, of the question is true; that either matter is divisible in *infinitum*, or not; that it consists of indivisibles, or not; these are contradictions. And it is one of the most evident propositions that the mind of man is acquainted with, that contradictions cannot be true, or that both sides of a contradiction cannot hold. And yet against this truth, whereon much of our most certain knowledge depends, insoluble difficulties may be urged: for it may be pretended, that here both sides of the contradiction are true, and this pretence may be enforced by the arguments above mentioned, which confirm the opposite opinions, which no mortal can answer. Shall we therefore believe that contradictions may be true?

That motion is possible I am not like to doubt, nor can I, while I know that I can rise and walk; nor is he like to doubt of it, who sees me walk. And yet I doubt not the most ingenious of our atheistical wits would find himself sufficiently straitened, were the arguments of *Zeno Eleates* against motion well urged, by a subtle disputant. I shall offer one argument against motion, which I am fully satisfied will puzzle the most subtle adversaries of religion to solve satisfyrigly. There are stronger arguments proving that matter is divisible in *infinitum* than any mortal can solve or answer, though I perhaps believe it untrue. And it is as certain as the sun is in the firmament, that if matter is divisible in *infinitum*, it consists of an infinite number of parts—(what some talk of indefinite is a shelter of ignorance, and if it is used any other way

* "I would fain have instanced in our notion of spirit any thing more perplexed, or nearer a contradiction, than the very notion of body includes in it; the divisibility in *infinitum* of any finite extension, involving us, whether we grant or deny it, in consequences impossible to be explicated, or made in our apprehensions consistent; consequences that carry greater difficulty, and more apparent absurdity than any thing that can follow from the notion of an immaterial substance."—*Locke on the Human Understanding*, edit. 5, p. 207.

than as a shield to ward off difficulties for a while in a public dispute, the users cannot be excused either of gross ignorance, rooted prejudice, or disingenuity). This being laid down as proven, and proven it may be by arguments, which none living can satisfy, that matter is divisible in *infinitum*, and that consequently it contains an infinite number of parts. Nor is it less certain, that according to these conclusions laid down, if one body move upon the surface of another, as for instance, an inch in a minute's time, it must pass by an infinite number of parts; and it is undeniable, that it cannot pass one of that infinite number of parts without some portion of time. Now if so, what a vast portion of time, will it require to make that little journey, which we know can be performed in a moment! Will it not evidently require an eternity! What difficulty can any urge, more difficult to be solved, against religion than this? And yet for all this he were a fool who would doubt of motion.

As to mathematical certainty, though many boasts are made of the firmness of its demonstrations; yet these may, upon this ground, be called all in question. And I nothing doubt, that if men's interests, real or pretended, lay as cross to them, as they are supposed to do to the truths of a religion, many more exceptions might be made against them, than are against those, and upon full as good, if not better reason. In justification of this assertion, I might proceed to demonstrate how trifling even the definitions of geometry, the firmest of all the mathematical sciences, are. Its definitions might be alleged, upon no inconsiderable grounds, trifling, nonsensical, and ridiculous. Its demands or postulates, plainly impracticable. Its axioms or self-evident propositions, controvertible, and by themselves they are controverted. Any one who would see this made good in particular instances, may consult (besides others) the learned *Huetius'* *Demonstratio Evangelica*, where, in the illustration of his definitions, axioms and postulates, he compares them with those of geometry, and prefers them to these, and shows they are incumbered with fewer difficulties than the other, though without derogating from the just worth and evidence of mathematical sciences. Besides what he has observed, I may add this one thing more, that those sciences deserve not any great regard, save as they are applied to the use of life, and in a subserviency to man's advantage. And when thus they are applied to practice, the difficulty is considerably increased, and they may easily be loaded with innumerable and insoluble inconveniences. For then, their definitions cease to be the definition of names, and are to be taken as the definitions of things that are actually in being. Their demands must not be practicable, but put in practice. And who sees not how many inextricable difficulties the practiser will be cast upon? The demonstration may proceed bravely so long as they hold in the theory, and mean by *Punctum id cujus pars nulla est*;* and the same may be said of lines and surfaces, and all their figures; without obliging us to believe that really there are any such things. But when we come to the practice, they must go further, and take it for granted, that there are such points, lines, surfaces and figures. This turns what was before only an explication of a name, into the definition of a thing. And therefore I am now left at liberty to dispute, whether there is any such thing; or, whether indeed it is possible that there should be such. And who sees not now, that they are incumbered with as many difficulties as may perhaps be urged against any science whatsoever.

* That which has no parts.

It were endless to enumerate the things we must believe, without being capable to resolve the difficulties about them. The veriest infidel must suppose that something is eternal, or all things are eternal, or that they jumped into being without any cause. Whichsoever he shall choose, he is led into a labyrinth of difficulties, which no mortal wit can clear. We must all own, that either matter and motion are the principle of thought; or, that there are immaterial substances which affect matter, and strangely affected by what befalls it. Whichsoever side any shall choose, he is cast upon inextricable difficulties. Much more might be said on this head; but what has been said is more than enough to show, that if this course is taken, it saps the foundations of all human knowledge, and there is no part of it safe.

Besides, this way of questioning religion upon the pretence of difficulties lying against it, is contrary to the common sense of mankind, contradicts the practice of all wise men, and is inconsistent with the very nature of our faculties. For, if I have a clear unexceptionable and convincing proof for any truth, it is against all reason to reject it, because I have not so full and comprehensive knowledge of the nature and circumstances of the object, as is necessary to enable me to solve all difficulties that may occur about it: yea, such is the nature of our faculties, that to justify in the opinion of the nicest inquirers after truth, nay, to extort an assent, clear proof is sufficient; whereas, to untie all knots, and solve all objections, perfect and comprehensive knowledge is absolutely needful; which man's condition allows him not to expect about the meanest things. And the more remote any thing lies from common observation, the less reason there is still to look for a fullness of knowledge and exemption from difficulties. If therefore men will turn sceptics in religion, to justify themselves, they must attempt the proofs whereon it is grounded. Sampson like, they must grasp the pillars that support the fabric, and pull them down. If this is not done, nothing is done. And he that will undertake this, must have a full view of their force, and find where their strength lies: now a serious view of this will be sufficient to deter any wise man from the undertaking.

In a word, this scepticism can yield no ease or satisfaction to a reasonable soul. For if a man shall think rationally, his reason will suggest to him, that though all religion at present seems uncertain to him, yet upon trial perhaps he may find the grounds of religion so evident, that he cannot withhold his assent. This will at least oblige him to a serious inquiry into the truth. Next, in uncertainties (supposing, after serious inquiry, he still thinks the truths of religion such) a prudent man will incline to what is most probable. Finally, he will choose and steer such a course of life as will be safest, in case he shall in experience afterward find, that there is a God, and a future state. All which show the folly of our sceptics, and, were it seriously considered, would much mar their design, which is thereby to justify a licentious life.

Now we have considered, and sufficiently exposed the two first branches of the above-mentioned choice: and consequently every man must find himself cast upon a necessity of one of two. He must either betake himself to *natural religion*, and so turn *Deist*; or he must embrace the *Scriptures*, and turn *Christian*: for as to the Jewish religion, it is not likely to gain many converts.

If therefore we are able to demonstrate the utter insufficiency of na-

tural religion, in opposition to the Deists who set up for it, we reduce every man to this choice, that he must be a Christian or an Atheist ; or, which is the same upon the matter, a man of no religion ; for an insufficient religion is in effect none. And to demonstrate this, that natural religion is utterly insufficient, that unassisted reason is not able to guide us to happiness, and satisfy us as to the great concerns of religion, is the design of the subsequent sheets. In them we have clearly stated and endeavored with closeness to argue this point. We have brought the pleadings of the learned Lord Herbert, and the modern deists, who do but copy after him, to the bar of reason, examined their utmost force, and, if I mistake it not, found them weak and inconcludent.

As for the occasion of my engagement in this controversy, it was not such as commonly gives rise to writings of this nature. I undertook it with no design of publication. I was provoked by no adversary in particular. But every man being obliged to understand upon what grounds he receives his religion, I studied the point for my own satisfaction, and in compliance with my duty.

As for the reasons of my undertaking this part of the controversy, I shall not say much. The only wise GOD, *who has determined the times before appointed, and made of one blood all nations that dwell on the earth, has appointed them the bounds of their habitation*, cut out different pieces of work for them, cast them into different circumstances, and hereby exposed them to trials and temptations that are not of the same kind. As every man is obliged to cultivate in the best manner he can the bounds of land assigned to him, and defend his possessions ; so every one is concerned to improve and defend after the best form he may, those truths, which his circumstances have obliged him to take peculiar notice of, and his temptations, of whatever sort, have endeavored, or may attempt to wrest out of his hands.

Besides, we live in a warlike age, wherein every one must be of a party in matters of religion. And religion is a cause in which, when disputed, no man is allowed to stand neutral. As all are concerned to choose the right side, so every one is obliged to provide himself with the best armor his arsenal can afford, both for defending himself and others that own the same cause, and to annoy the common enemy. Nor is this work peculiarly confined unto those, who by office are obliged to it : for, *in pulico discrimini est omnis homo miles*.*

Besides, it is well known, that the most bold attempt that ever was made upon revealed religion, since the entrance of Christianity into the world, has been made, in our day, by men who set up for *natural religion*, and who have gone over from Christianity unto a refined Paganism, under the name of Deism. Two things they have attempted ; to overthrow revelation, and to advance natural religion. The last work has been undertaken, I may without breach of charity boldly say it, not so much out of any real affection to the principles or duties of natural religion, as to avoid the odium inevitably following upon a renunciation of all religion ; and because they saw that men would not easily quit Christianity, without something were substituted in its room, that might at least have the name of religion. *Revealed religion* has been worthily defended by many, of old and of late, at home and abroad ; but the *insufficiency of natural religion* has been less insisted on, at least in that way that is necessary to straiten an obstinate adversary. And

* In a time of public danger every man is a soldier.

AN INQUIRY
INTO THE
PRINCIPLES OF THE MODERN DEISTS.

CHAPTER I.

Giving a short account of the Rise, Occasions, and Progress of Deism, especially in England, the Opinions of the Deists, and the different sorts of them.

THERE is no man, who makes it his concern to understand what the state of religion has, of late years, been, and now is, particularly in these nations, but knows that *Deism* has made a considerable progress. Since therefore it is against those, who go under this name, that this undertaking is designed, it is highly expedient, if not plainly necessary, that in the entry, we give some account of the *occasions* and *rise* of *Deism*, the principal opinions of the *Deists*, and some other things that may tend to clear the matter discoursed in the subsequent sheets.

It is not necessary that we inquire more largely into the causes of that general defection in principle and practice from the doctrine of the Gospel which now every where obtains; this has been judiciously done by others.

Nor will it be needful to write at length the history of *Deism*. This I think impracticable, because the growth of this sect has been very secret, and they have generally disguised their opinions. And perhaps till of late, they scarce had any settled opinion in matters of religion, if yet they have. But though it were practicable, as it is not yet it is not necessary to our present undertaking; and if it were attempted, would require more helps, and more leisure, besides other things, than I am master of.

One has of late written a pamphlet bearing this title, "An Account of the Growth of *Deism* in England."* The author, if he is not a deist, yet has done what in him lies to promote their cause, by setting off, with all the art and address he is master of, those things which, he says, have tempted many to turn deists, without any attempt to antidote the poison of them.

Another has wrote *Reflections* upon this pamphlet, wherein he has sufficiently shewn, that those alleged by the former author, were not sufficient reasons to justify any in turning Deist. But I conceive that is not the main question. If he had a mind to disprove the other author, he should have made it appear, that the particulars condescended upon by his antagonist, had no real influence into this apostacy. Whether they gave a just cause for it, is another question. I am satisfied they did not. But neither do those reasons of this defection, condescended

* Printed anno. domini. 1690.

on by the *reflector*, give a sufficient ground for it. Nor are there any reasons that can justify any in relinquishing Christianity. The inquiry in this case is not, What just grounds have the Deists to warrant them in, or engage them to this defection? for all Christians own it impossible they should have any. But the question is, What has given occasion to any, thus to fall off from our religion? Now I conceive both these writers have hit upon several of the true reasons of this; though the first is apparently guilty of *deep imprudence*, I wish I might not say *malice*, against Christianity, in proposing those temptations, with all the advantage he could give them, and that without any antidote: For which and other faults he has been justly, though modestly, censured by the *reflector*. Although both of them have given some account of this matter, yet I conceive so much has not been said as may supercede a further inquiry, or make us despair of observing not a few things that have not had an inconsiderable influence, which are overlooked by both. Wherefore we shall in a few words propose our opinion of this matter. And in delivering it, we shall not pursue the design of any party, but make it evident that all parties have had their own accession to the *growth* of this *evil*. Though I am sensible that this account will fall heavy upon a set of men in particular, who have of late years claimed the name of the Church of England, though unjustly; if we take her homilies; articles, and the consentient judgment of her renowned bishops from the time of the Reformation to Bishop Laud's time, for the standard of her doctrine;* and I see no reason why we ought not. I premised this to avoid any suspicion of a design to brand the Church of England, with an accession to the growth of Deism. And even in speaking of that set of men, whom I take to be principally guilty, I would not be understood to speak so much of the *design* of the men, as of the *native tendency* of their *doctrine* and *practices*.

The many groundless, nay ridiculous pretences to *revelation*, and bold impostures of the Church of Rome, and of those who have supported that interest; their impudence in obtruding upon the world, doctrines cross to reason and sense, and principles of morality subversive of the whole law of nature;† their scandalous endeavor to bespatter the Scriptures, and weaken their authority, on purpose to bring them into discredit, to make way for the designed advancement of their wild traditions into an equality with them, and to bring the world under a necessity of throwing themselves upon the care and conduct of their *infallible guide*, though they cannot yet tell us which is he; their gross and discernable hypocrisy in carrying on secular, nay impious and unjust designs, under the specious pretences of *holiness* and *religion*; their zeal for a *form* and *show of religion*, a worship plainly *theatrical*,‡ while the lives of their Popes, Cardinals, Monks, Nuns, and all their highest pretenders to devotion have been scandalously lewd, even to a proverb;§ the *immoral morality*, *atheistical divinity*, and *abominable practices* of the Jesuits, those zealous supporters and strongest props of the Popish interest, but in very deed the worst enemies of mankind, the

* See Bishop of Sarum's Explanation of the thirty-nine Articles, on Art. 17; p. 168.

† Growth of Deism, p. 5. Reflections on it, p. 8.

‡ See Jesuit's Morals.

§ Clarkson's Practical Divinity of Papists.

several things incline me to think an attempt of this nature reasonable, if not necessary, at this time.

The times are infectious, and Deism is the contagion that spreads. And that which has taken many, particularly of our unwary youth of the better quality, off their feet, and engaged them to espouse this cause, is the high pretence that this way makes to reason. They tell us, that their religion is entirely reasonable, and that they admit nothing, save what this dictates to them, and they endeavor to represent others as easy and credulous men. Now I thought it meet to demonstrate, for undeceiving of such, that none are more credulous, none have less reason upon their side, than they who set up for *rational religion*.

Again, we have stood sufficiently long upon the defensive part, we have repulsed their efforts against revelation. It seems now reasonable, that we should act offensively, and try how they can defend their own religion, and whether they can give as good account of it as has been given of Christianity. To stand always upon the defensive part, is to make the enemy doubt ours, and turn proud of their own strength.

The reasonableness of this will further appear, if we consider the quality of the adversaries we have to do with, and their manner of management. The enemies who have engaged revealed religion, sensible of their own weakness to defend themselves at home, and endure close fight, do commonly make inroads, where they expect none, or a faint resistance. They design not so much to conquer, as to disturb. Jest, buffoonery, or at best sophisms, and such little artifices, are the arguments they use, and the weapons of their warfare. The best way to make such rovers keep at home is, to carry the war into their own country, and to ruin those retreats they betake themselves to when attacked. They have seen what Christians can say in defence of *revealed religion*. It is now high time to see how they can acquit themselves on behalf of *natural religion*. It is easy to impugn. It is a defence that gives the best proof of the defender's skill, and says most for the cause he maintains.

I own indeed that most who have evinced the truth of revealed religion, have said something of the weakness of natural religion. But this has only been by the bye, and in a way too loose to straiten obstinate opposers, not to speak of the too large concessions that have been made them by some.

Finally, *natural religion* being the only retreat, to which the apostates from Christianity betake themselves, and whereby they think themselves secured from the imputation of plain atheism, it is hoped, that a full and convincing discovery of its weakness, may incline such as are not quite debauched, to look how they quit Christianity, and engage with that which if this attempt is successful, must henceforth pass for *disguised atheism*.

It now only remains, that I offer some account of the reasons that have induced me to manage this controversy in a method so far different from that which is commonly used. The reasons of this have been above insinuated, and I shall not insist much further on them, lest I should seem to detract from performances to which I pay a very great regard. The method some have chosen, in managing this controversy with the Deists, to me appears inconvenient. They begin with an endeavor to establish the grounds of natural religion, and by the help of light borrowed from revelation, they carry the matter so far, and extend natural religion to such a compass, that it looks pretty complete-like; which has too evident a tendency to lessen its real defects, and make them appear inconsiderable.

Again, I am afraid that some have gone near to give up the whole cause. This fault I would be very loth to charge upon all. Many I know have dealt faithfully in it, and deserve praise. But how to excuse some in this case I know not. One tells us that, "It is true indeed, that natural religion declares and comprises all the parts of religion, that are generally and in all times either necessary or requisite!"* And much more to the same purpose. This is much such another assertion of the weakness of natural religion against the Deists, as the same author gives us of the perfection of the Scriptures, in opposition to the same persons in another place of his book. "I could," says he, "prove, I think, by undeniable, unavoidable instances,"† what Mr. Gregory of Oxford says in his preface to some critical notes on the Scriptures that he published, viz. "That there is no author whatsoever that has suffered so much by the hand of time as the Bible has." Is this the way to overthrow the sufficiency of natural religion, and to defend the Scriptures? This is not the only remark I could make upon this author, were it my design. But this may let us see how necessary it is to deal a little more plainly with the asserters of natural religion.

Further, to adorn natural religion with the improvements borrowed from revelation, is the ready way to furnish those who set up for its *sufficiency*, with pretences to serve their design, and to straiten themselves when they come to show its defects. And perhaps I should not mistake it far, if I asserted, that the strongest arguments urged by Deists, have been drawn from unwary concessions made them by their adversaries.

And this is the more considerable, that the persons, with whom we have to do in this controversy, are, generally speaking, either of no great discerning, or small application; who have no great mind to wait upon the business, or look to the bottom of it. Now when such persons find many things granted, they are ready to think all is yielded, and so run away with it, as the cause were their own. That such concessions have done no good service, there is too much reason to believe. This I am sure of, it would have been long before the Deists could have trimmed up natural religion so handsomely, and made it appear so like a sufficient religion, as some have done, who meant no such thing.

Finally, the apostle Paul's method is doubtless most worthy of imitation, who, when he is to prove justification by faith, and enforce an acceptance of it, strongly convinces of sin, and the utter insufficiency of works for that purpose. The best way in my opinion, to engage men to close with *revealed religion*, is strongly to argue the *insufficiency of natural religion*.

As to the performance itself, and what I have therein attained, I am not the judge competent. Every reader must judge as he sees cause. I have not the vanity to expect that it should please every body. The vast compass of the subject, the variety of the purposes, the uncommonness of many, if not most of them, with respect to which I was left to walk in untrodden paths, and other difficulties of a like nature, with candid and judicious readers will go a great way towards my excuse in lesser escapes. As for the substance of the ensuing discourse, I am bold to hope, that upon the strictest trial it shall be found true, and pleaded for in words of truth and soberness.

* Discourse concerning Natural and Revealed Religion, by Stephen Nye, part 2, chap. i. p. 97.

† *Ubi supra*, p. 199.

subverters of all *true piety, morality* and *government* in the world ; these, I say, together with many other evils of a like nature, every where observable in that church, have been, for a very long time too evident and gross to be denied, or hid from persons of any tolerable sagacity, living among them. And, by the observation of those and the like evils, continued in, approved, justified, and adhered unto ; and the cruelty of that church in destroying all those, who would not receive, by wholesale, all those shocking absurdities, not a few who lived among them, and were unacquainted with the power of religion, that was necessary to engage them cordially to espouse the reformed interest, got their minds leavened with prejudices, and furnished with specious pretences against all revealed religion ; which they the more boldly entertained, because they knew it was less criminal to turn Atheist than Protestant in places where the Popish interest prevailed.

These prejudices once taken up, daily grew stronger, by the observation of new instances of this sort, and the constancy of those of that communion in acting the same part. And men of wit and learning, who soonest saw into this mystery, and had no inward bonds on them, failed not to hand about and cultivate these pretences to that degree, that many begun to own their apostacy, if not openly, yet more covertly.

Not long after the beginning of the last elapsed century, so far as I can learn, some in France and Italy began to form a sort of new party. They called themselves *Theists, or Deists* ; unjustly pretending that they were the only persons who owned the *One true God*. And hereby they plainly intimated that they had rejected the name of *Christ*. They rejected all revelation as cheat, priestcraft, and imposture, pretending that there was nothing sincere in religion, save what nature's light taught. However, being generally persons too fond of a present life, and too uncertain about a future, they thought it not meet to put too much to the hazard for this their pretended religion. It was a refined sort of Paganism which they embraced, and they were to imitate the Heathen philosophers, who, whatever their peculiar sentiments were in matters of religion, yet for peace's sake, they looked on it as safe to follow the mode, and comply with the religious usages that prevailed in the places where they lived. That which made this party the more considerable was, that it was made up of men, who pretended to learning, ingenuity, breeding, and who set up for wits. They pretended to write after the copy of the new philosophers, who scorned that philosophical slavery, which former ages had been under to Aristotle. They inculcated that credulity was no less dangerous in matters of religion than in matters of philosophy. And herein certainly they were not mistaken. But one may justly suspect, that at the same time, while they pretended to guard against easiness in believing, they have fallen into the worst credulity, as well as ruining incredulity. For none is so credulous as an Atheist.

Much about the same time, some novel opinions began to be much entertained in Holland, in matters of religion. The broachers of them being men learned and diligent, carefully cultivated them, till they were ripened into something very near akin to plain Socinianism, which is but one remove from Deism. It was not long after this when those new fangled notions took footing in England and began to be embraced and

countenanced by some *topping churchmen*, who forgetful of their articles, homilies, and subscriptions, and the conduct of their predecessors, carefully maintained, and zealously propagated this new divinity.

I shall not make bold to judge what the designs of those were, who appeared most zealous for these new notions: this is to be left to the judgment of him, who *searches the heart of the children of men, and will bring forth things that are now hid*. But there were not a few reasons to suspect that the Jesuits had a considerable hand in disseminating them, and that the others were their tools; though it is likely they did not suspect this. The Jesuits vaunted that they had planted the *sovereign drug* of Armenianism in England, which in time would purge out the *northern heresy*.^{*} This it could not otherwise do, than by shaking men as to all principles of religion. And it is a known maxim, that *make men once Atheists it will be easy to turn them Papists*. The jealousies many discerning people had of this, were considerably increased when it was seen with what violence the abettors of this new divinity appeared against the more moderate part of the Church of England, as well as the Dissenters, upon the account of some ceremonies, owned by themselves as indifferent in their own nature; while at the same time, they expressed a great deal of tenderness, if not respect to the Church of Rome, and made proposals for *union* with her.

But whatever there is as to this, it is certain that this divinity opens a door, and has given encouragement to that apostacy from Christianity, that has since followed, and still increases, under the name of Deism.

This divinity teaches us, that no more is necessary to be believed, in order to salvation, save what is confessed and owned by all that are called Christians. *Dicunt se non videre unde aut quo modo, præter pauca ista, quæ apud omnes in confesso sunt, alia plura adhuc necessaria esse ostendi aut elici possit*:† that is, “They see not how it can be made to appear, that besides these few things, which are by them allowed, any others are necessary to salvation.” Consonantly hereto, they expressly deny any thing to be *fundamental* which has been controverted, or afterwards may be so.‡ In a word, they teach that we are not necessarily to believe any thing, save what is evident to us. And that only is to be reckoned evident, which is confessed by all, and to which nothing that has any appearance of truth can be opposed. Now after this, what is left in Christianity? The divinity, the purity, the perfection and sufficiency of the Scriptures; the Trinity, Deity of Christ, his satisfaction, the whole dispensation of the Spirit, justification by faith alone, and all the articles of the Christian religion, have been and are controverted. None of them therefore is necessary to salvation. Are not men left at liberty, without hazard of their salvation, to renounce all, save what is common to Christianity with natural religion? and since even some of its most considerable articles about the attributes of God and his providence, future rewards and punishments, have been, or may be controverted, why may we not reckon them unnecessary too? The Deists have borrowed their *doctrine of evidence*, and opposed it to the Chris-

^{*} Rushworth's Collect. part i. p. 475. Letter by a Jesuit to the Rector of Brussels. See p. 62, *ibid*.

† Remonstr. Apol. p. 12.

‡ *Ibi*, Cap. 24, p. 276; and Cap. 25, p. 293.

tian religion. One of them tells us, "If our happiness depends upon our belief, we cannot firmly believe, till our reason be convinced of a supernatural religion.*" And if the reasons of it were evident, there could be no longer any contention about religion. How little does this differ from that divinity, which tells us, that God is obliged to offer us such arguments to which nothing that has an appearance of truth can be opposed! And if this be wanting, they are not to be received as articles of faith. Now if after this the Deists can but offer any thing that has an *appearance* of truth against Christianity, they are free to reject it *in cumulo*.

This divinity reduces Christianity to *mere morality*. Nothing else is universally agreed to, if that be so. "The supposition of sin, (says one that wore a mitre) does not bring in any new religion, but only makes new circumstances and names of old things, and requires new helps and advantages to improve our powers, and to encourage our endeavors: and thus the *law of grace* is nothing but a restitution of the *law of nature*."†

And further, lest we should think this morality, wherein they place the whole of Christianity, owes its being to the agency of the sanctifying Spirit, we are told, that "the Spirit of God, and the grace of Christ, when used as distinct from moral abilities and performance, signify nothing."‡ And a complaint is made of some, who fill the world "with a buzz and noise of the Divine Spirit."§ Hence many sermons were rather such as became the chair of a philosopher, teaching ethics, than than that of one, who by office is bound to know and preach nothing *save Christ and him crucified*. Heathen morality has been substituted in the room of Gospel holiness. And ethics by some have been preached instead of the Gospel of Christ. And if any complaints were made of this conduct, though by men who preached the necessity of holiness, urged by all the Gospel motives, and carefully practised what they preached in their lives, they were exposed and rejected, and the persons who offered them were reflected on as enemies to morality; whereas the plain truth of the case was, they did not complain of men being taught to be moral, but that they were not taught somewhat more.

After men once were taught that the controverted doctrines of religion were not necessary to salvation, and that all that was necessary thereto was to be referred to and comprehended under morality, and that there was no need of regeneration, or the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of Christ in order to the performance of our duty, it is easy to see how light the difference was to be accounted betwixt a Christian and an honest moral heathen. And if any small temptation offered, how natural was it for men to judge that the hazard was not great, to step over from *Christianity* to *Deism*, which is *Paganism a-la-mode*. And to encourage them to it, it is well known how favorably many used to express themselves of the state of the heathens; little minding that the Christian religion represents them as *without God, and without Christ, and without hope, children of wrath, and dead in trespasses and sins*.

I need not stand to prove that this divinity is nearly allied to Socini-

* Oracles of Reason, p. 206. Letter by A. W. to C. Blount.

† S. Park's Defence of Eccles. Poli. p. 324.

‡ *Idem ibid*, p. 343.

§ Eccles. Polit. p. 57.

anism. It is well known that they reckon the Socinians sound in the fundamentals, and therefore think them in no hazard, provided they live morally. Hence men have been emboldened to turn Socinians. And every body may see by what easy removes, one may from Socinianism arrive at Deism. For my part I can see little difference betwixt the two. The Deist indeed seems the honester man of the two; he rejects the Gospel, and owns that he does so: the other, I mean the Socinian, pretends to retain it, but really rejects it. But I shall not insist any further in discovering the tendency of this new divinity to libertinism, and Deism, since others have fully and judiciously done it from the most unquestionable arguments and documents. And more especially, since in fact it is evident, that wherever this new divinity has obtained, Socinians and Deists abound, and many who embrace it daily go over to them; which I take to be the surest evidence, if it be duly circumstantiated, of the tendency of this doctrine to encourage those opinions, and least liable to any just exception. And perhaps I might add, that few, comparatively very few, who own the contrary doctrine, have gone into this new way, where that divinity has not been entertained.

But to return whence we have for a little digressed, to the state of religion in England. No sooner were they advanced to power who had drunk in those opinions, but presently the doctrines that are purely evangelical, by which the apostles converted the world, the Reformers promoted and carried on our reformation from Popery, and the pious preachers of the Church of England did keep somewhat of the life and power of religion amongst their people; these doctrines, I say, began to be decried; justification by the righteousness of Christ, which Luther called *Articulus stantici aut cadentis ecclesiæ*,* that redemption that is in him, even the forgiveness of sins through faith in his blood; the mystery of the grace, mercy and love of God manifested in Christ; the great mystery of Godliness; the dispensation of the Spirit for conviction, renovation, sanctification, consolation and edification of the church, by a supply of spiritual gifts, and other doctrines of a like tendency, were, upon all occasions boldly exposed, and discredited in press and pulpit. The ministers who dared to avow them, from a conviction of the truth, the sense of the obligation of their promises and subscriptions to the articles, were sure to have no preferment, nay, to be branded with the odious names of *Calvanists, Puritans, Fanatics*, and I know not what.

The doctrines of faith were not regarded as belonging to the foundation of religion. The morality of the Bible was pretended the only thing that was necessary; and as much of the doctrine, as all, even Socinians, Quakers, and all the rest were agreed in, were sufficient. And if any opposed this, though in civil language and by fair arguments, they were sure to be exposed as enemies to morality; although their adversaries durst not put the contest on this issue with them, that he should be reckoned the greatest friend to morality who was most blameless in his walk, and showed it the greatest practical regard. They could exercise charity, forbearance, and love to a Socinian that has renounced all the fundamental truth of religion; but none to a poor dissenter, who sincerely believed all the doctrinal articles; nay, even a sober churchman, who could not consent to new unauthorized ceremonies, was become

* An article by which the church must either stand or fall.

intolerable. So that men, at this time, might, with much more credit and less hazard, turn Socinian, or any thing, than discover the least regard to truths contained in the articles, owned by most of the Reformed churches, and taught by our own Reformers. This is too well known to be denied by any one who knows how things were carried on at that time and since.*

Further, whereas preachers formerly, in order to engage men to a compliance with the Gospel, were wont to press much upon them their guilt, the impossibility of standing before God in their own righteousness, their impotency, their misery by the fall, the necessity of regeneration, illumination, the power of grace to make them willing to comply, and that no man could sincerely call *Christ Lord*, and be subject to him practically, *save by the Holy Ghost*; care was now taken to unteach them all this, and to show them how very little they had lost by the fall, if any thing was lost by it, either in point of light to discern, or power and inclination to practice duty. They were told how great length their own righteousness would go, and that it would do their business; they might safely stand before God in it; or if there was any room for Christ's righteousness, it was only to piece out their own, where it was wanting. In a word, the people were told, what fine persons many of the heathens were, who knew nothing of illumination, regeneration, or what the Bible was, and how little odds, if any at all, there was betwixt grace and morality.

And, whereas a veneration for the Lord's day was a means to keep people under some concern about religion, and that day was spent by faithful ministers, in pressing upon the consciences of their people, those new-contemned Gospel truths, to the spoiling of the whole plot; care was taken to discredit and bring it into contempt. Ministers, instead of telling them on that day, that they were too much inclined to sin, levity, folly, and vanity, were commanded to deal with them as persons too much inclined to be serious; and instead of preaching the Gospel, they were required, under the highest pains, to entertain them with a profane *Book of Sports*. And for disobedience many were ejected. And that they might be taught by example as well as precept, a *Sunday's evening mask* was publicly acted, where were present persons of no mean note.†

Moreover, a state game being now to be played, the pulpit, press, religion and all were made to truckle to state designs, and to the enslaving of the nations, by advancing the doctrines of *passive obedience, non-resistance, and jure-divino-ship* of kings;‡ whereby men of religion were wounded to see the ordinances of Christ prostituted to such projects, as were entirely foreign, to say no worse, to the design of their institution: and men of no religion, or who were not fixed about it, were drawn over to think it a mere cheat, and that the design of it was only to carry on secular interest under specious pretences.

* Any one that would be satisfied in the truth of this, must peruse the sermons and writings published by that party of old and of late, and the histories of those times, particularly *Rushworth's Collect.*, the speeches of the Long Parliament, and later writings, and they will find documents more than enough. And they may consult also *Honorii Regii's Comment. de Statu Ecclesie Anglicanae*

† *Rushworth's Collect.* part 2. vol. i. p. 459.

‡ *Bishop of Sarum on the Articles*, Art. 7, p. 152.

At length by those means, and some other things, which are not of our present consideration, concurring, confusions ripened into a civil war, whereby every one was left to speak, write, and live as he pleased.

Many who intended no hurt, while they upon honest designs inquired into, and laid open the faults of the topping clergy, did unawares furnish loose and atheistical men with pretences against the ministry. And what in truth gave only ground for a dislike of the persons faulty, was received by many as a just ground of prejudice against the very pastoral, as priest-craft, and all who are clothed with it, as a set of self-designing men.

The body of the people, who had been debauched by the example of a scandalous clergy, and hardened in sin by the intermission of all discipline, (which of late had only been exercised against the sober and pious who could not go into the measures that were taken), the neglect of painful preaching, the *Book of Sports and Pastimes*, and who had their heads filled with airy and self-elating notions of man's ability to good, free-will, universal grace, and the like, and who now, when they much needed the inspection of their faithful pastors, were deprived of it, many of them, by the iniquity of the times, being forced to take sanctuary in foreign nations; the people, I say, by these things turned quite giddy, and broke into numberless sects and parties. Every one who had entertained those giddy notions was zealous, even to madness, for propagating them, and thought himself authorized to plead for them, print for them, and preach them. The office of the ministry, that had before been rendered contemptible by the suppression of the best preachers, and the scandalous lives of those who were mainly encouraged, was now made more so, by the intrusion of every bold, ignorant and assuming enthusiast. The land was filled with books of controversy, stuffed with unsound, offensive and scandalous tenets, which were so multiplied, as they never have been in any nation of the world, in so small a compass of time. The generality of the people being, by the neglect of a scandalous ministry, and the discouragement of those who were laborious, drenched in ignorance, were easily shaken by those controversial writings that were disseminated every where, and became an easy prey to every bold sectarian.

Many of the better sort set themselves to oppose these extremes, and from a detestation of them were carried, some into one evil, some into another; whereby the common enemy reaped advantage, and *truth* suffered even by its defenders. Ministers who desired to be faithful, by the abounding of those errors, were forced to oppose them in public; whereby preaching became less edifying, and disputes increased, to the great detriment of religion.

The nation was thus crumbled into parties, in matters both civil and religious, the times turned cloudy and dark. Pretences of religion were dreadfully abused on all hands to subserve other designs. And even the best both of ministers and people wanted not their own sad failings, which evil men made the worst use of. The *word* and *providence* were used in favor of so many cross opinions and practices, that not a few began to run into that same extreme, which some in France and Italy had before gone into. And about this time it was that the learned *Herbert* began to write in favor of Deism: of which we shall have occasion to speak afterwards.

After the restoration, things were so far from being mended, that they grew worse. Lewdness and atheism were encouraged at the court, which now looked like a little Sodom. The clergy turned no less scandalous, if not more so than before. Impiety was, as it were, publicly and with applause acted and taught on the stage, and all serious religion was there exposed and ridiculed. Yea, the pulpits of many became theatres, whereupon men assumed the boldness to ridicule serious godliness, and the gravest matters of religion; such as communion with God, confession of sin, prayer by the Spirit, and the whole work of conversion. Controversial writings were multiplied, and in them grave and serious truths were handled in a jocular way. The Scriptures were burlesqued, and the most important truths, (under pretence of exposing the Dissenters, to the great grief of all good men among them, and in the Church of England), were treated with contempt and scorn. The pulpits were again prostituted to state designs and doctrines; and the great truths of the Gospel, in reference to man's misery, and his recovery by Jesus Christ, were entirely neglected by many; and discourses of morality came in their place, I mean a morality that has no respect to Christ as its end, author, and the ground of its acceptance with God, which is plain *heathenism*. The soberer, and the better part were traduced as enthusiastical, disloyal hypocrites, and I know not what. And sometimes they on the other hand, in their own defence, were constrained to lay open the impiety, atheism, and blasphemous boldness of their traducers in their way of management of Divine things. And while matters were thus carried betwixt them, careless and indifferent men, especially of the better and most considerable quality, being debauched in their practice, by the licentiousness of the court, the immorality and looseness of the stage, were willing to conform their principles to their practice; for which this state of things gave them a favorable occasion and plausible pretences. Men whose walk and way looked like any thing of a real regard to religion, they heard so often traduced as hypocrites, fanatics, and I know not what, that they were easily induced to believe them to be such. They who taught them so, on the other hand, by the liberty they assumed in practice, convinced these gentlemen, that whatever their profession was, yet they believed nothing about religion themselves; and therefore it was easy to infer that all was but a cheat. Besides, the Popish party, who were sufficiently encouraged, while the sober Dissenters of the Protestant persuasion were cruelly persecuted, made it their business to promote this unsettledness in matters of religion. They found themselves unable to stand their ground in way of fair debate, and therefore they craftily set themselves rather to shake others in their faith, than directly to press them to a compliance with their own sentiments. And it is well known they wrote many books full of sophistry, plainly leveling at this, to bring men to believe *nothing*: as well knowing, that if they were once brought there, they would soon be brought to believe *any thing* in matters of religion.

On these and the like occasions and pretences, arose this defection from the Gospel, which has been nourished by many of the same things which first gave it birth, till it is grown to such strength, as fills all well wishers to the interest of religion with just fears as to the issue.

Nor was it any wonder that these pretences should take, (especially with persons of liberal education and parts, who only were capable of

observing those faults which gave occasion for them), since the generality were prepared for, and inclined to such a defection, by a long continuance under the external dispensation of the Gospel, without any experience of its power, the prevalent love of lust, that makes men impatient of any thing that may have the least tendency to restrain them from pursuing the gratification thereof; to which we may add the natural enmity of the mind of man against the mystery of the Gospel.

There was another thing which at this time had no small influence,—the philosophical writings of Mr. Hobbs, Spinoza, and some others of the same kidney, got, one way or other, a great vogue amongst our young gentry and students, whereby many were poisoned with principles destructive of all true religion and morality.

By those and the like means, things are now come to that pass, that not a few have been bold to avow their apostacy from the Christian religion, not only in conversation, but in print. They disown the name of Christ, call themselves Deists, and glory in that name. They have published many writings reflecting on the Scriptures, and justifying themselves in rejecting them.

And we have just reason to suspect, that, besides those who do avow their principles, who are perhaps as numerous in these lands as any where else, there are many, who yet are ashamed to speak it out, who bear them good-will, and who want only a little time more to harden themselves against the odium that this way goes under, and a fair occasion of throwing off the mask, which they yet think meet to retain. Of this we have many indications.

Many have assumed an unaccountable boldness in treating things sacred and serious too freely in writing and conversation. They make bold to jest upon the Scriptures, and upon every occasion to traverse them. When once men have gone this length, the veneration due to that blessed book is gone, and they are in a fair way to reject it.

Others have made great advances to this defection, by disseminating and entertaining reproaches against a standing ministry. It is known what contempt has been cast upon this order of men, whom God had entrusted with the Gospel dispensation, and who, by office, are obliged to maintain its honor. If this order of men fall under that general contempt, which some do their utmost to bring them to, religion cannot long maintain its station among us. When the principal means of the Lord's appointment are laid aside, or rendered useless, no other means will avail.

And hereon, further, there follows a neglect of attendance on the ministry of the word, which the Lord has appointed for the edification of the church, and establishing people in the faith of the truth he has revealed to us therein. When this once begins to be neglected, men will soon turn sceptical and unconcerned about religion.

And further, it is very observable, that many are strengthened in this neglect, by principles calculated for this purpose; while the whole efficacy of preaching is made to depend, not on the blessing of Christ, whose institution it is, or the influences of his Spirit which he has promised for setting it home on the hearers for their conviction, conversion, and edification,—but on the abilities and address of the preachers. It is natural to conclude, that it is better to stay at home and read some book, than to go to sermon, if the preacher is not of very uncommon

abilities: which is a principle avowed by many, and their practice suits their principles.

Besides, which is the true spring of the former, I am afraid *ignorance* of the nature of *revealed religion*, the design of its institutions, and all its principal concerns, is become more common than is usually observed, even amongst men of liberal education and the best quality. And hence many of them entertain notions inconsistent with their own religion, at first out of ignorance, and afterwards think themselves in honor engaged to defend them, although destructive to the religion they profess.

Add to all this, that *profanity* in practice has, like a deluge, overspread these lands. And where this once takes place, love to sin never fails to engage men to those principles, which may countenance them in the courses they love, and design to cleave to.

This seems plainly to be the state of matters with us at present. And we see but little appearance of any redress. The infection spreads, and many are daily carried off by it, both in England and Scotland. Though it must be owned that Scotland, as yet, is less tainted with that poison: but those of this nation have no reason to be secure, since many are infected, and more are in a forwardness to it than is commonly thought.

Having given this short, but I conceive, true account of the rise and growth of Deism, it now remains that we consider, what these principles are which they maintain. The Deists, although they are not perfectly *one* amongst themselves, yet do agree in two things. 1. They all reject *revealed religion*, and plainly maintain that all pretences to revelation are vain, cheat, and imposture. 2. They all maintain that natural religion is sufficient to answer all the great ends of religion, and the only rule whereby all our religious practices are to be squared. The first of these assertions only tells what their religion *is not*, and expresses their opposition to all revelation, particularly to Christianity; which has been worthily defended and asserted against all their objections by many of late, and I shall not much insist in adding to what they have written to such excellent purpose. The second tells us what their religion *is*; and it is this we chiefly design in the following papers to debate with them. They have long been upon the *offensive* part, which is more easy; we design now to put them upon the *defensive*.

They who call themselves Deists although they thus far agree, yet are not all of one sort. I find them, by one of their own number classed into two sorts, *mortal* and *immortal*.*

The *immortal* are they who maintain a *future state*. The *mortal* they who *deny one*. It is with the first we are principally concerned; yet I shall in the subsequent, chapter offer a few things with respect to the *mortal Deists*. And in what I have to say of them I shall be very short; because I conceive, what has already been offered in the introduction, against this sort of men, might almost supersede any further discourse about them.

* Oracles of Reason, p. 99.

CHAPTER, II.

Mortal Deists who, and what judgment to be made of them and their sentiments.

THE *Mortal Deists*, who also are called *nominal Deists*, denying a *future state*, are, in effect, *mere Atheists*. This perhaps some may think a harsh judgment; but yet it is such as the Deists themselves, who are on the other side, will allow.

One who owns himself a Deist, thus expresses his mind,—“We do believe, there is an infinitely powerful, wise, and good God, who superintends the actions of mankind, in order to retribute to every one according to their deserts. Neither are we to boggle at this creed; for if we do not stick to it, we ruin the foundation of all human happiness, and are in effect no better than mere Atheists.”*

A further account of this sort of men we have given us by one, whom any may judge capable enough for it, who considers his way of writing, and the account he gives of himself. “I have observed some,” says he, “who pretend themselves Deists, that they are men of loose and sensual lives; and I make no wonder that they dislike the Christian doctrine of self-denial, and the severe threatenings against wilful sinners. You may be sure they will not allege this reason: but having read Spinoza and Hobbs, and being taught to laugh at the story of Balaam’s ass, and Sampson’s locks, they proceed to ridicule the reality of all miracles and revelation. I have conversed with several of this temper, but could never get any of them serious enough to debate the reality of religion,—but a witty jest, and t’other glass, puts an end to all further consideration.”† These are mere sceptics and practical Atheists, rather than real Deists.

Now, it is to no purpose to debate with men of this temper. If they will listen to arguments, many have said enough, if not to convince them, (for I know it is not an easy matter to convince some men,) yet to stop their mouths; and therefore I shall not offer any arguments,—only I shall lay down a few clear principles, and from them draw an inference or two, which will make it evident, what judgment we are to make of this sort of men.

The principles I take for incontrovertible are these which follow: 1. He deserves not the name of a man who acts not rationally; knowing what he does, and to what end. 2. No action which contributes not, at least in appearance, to man’s happiness is worthy of him. 3. The happiness of a present life, which is all that these gentlemen allow, consists in the enjoyment of things agreeable to our nature, and freedom from those that are noisome to it. 4. Man’s nature is such, that his felicity depends not only on these things, which at present he has, or wants; but likewise on what is past, and what is future. A prospect of the one, and a reflection on the other, according as they are more or less agreeable, exceedingly increases his pleasure or pain. 5. The hopes of obtaining hereafter the good we at present want, and of being freed from evils we suffer by, nightly enhances the pleasure of what we possess, and allays the trouble that arises from incumbent evils.

* Letter to the Deists, p. 125.

† Growth of Deism, p. 6.

So strong is the desire every one finds in himself of a continuation in being, as cannot choose but render the thoughts of *annihilation* very terrible and irksome. 7. The practice of *virtue*, as it is the most probable mean of attaining future happiness, if any such state be, so it is that which tends most to protect and advance man's nature; and so must give the most solid and durable pleasure, even here in this life. 8. It is malicious to do what tends to the obstructing another's happiness, when it cannot further one's own. Few men will question any of these, and if any do, it is not worth while to debate with him. Now from these we may see,

1. It would contribute much to those gentlemen's present felicity to believe, (be it true or false) that there is a *future state of happiness*, since the hopes of immutable and endless bliss would be a notable antidote against the uneasiness of mind that arises, not only from incumbent evils, but also from those we fear, and the inconsistency of our short lived enjoyments.

2. The generality of mankind, especially where Christianity obtains, being already possessed of the prospect of *future happiness*, which supports them under present evils, arms them against the troublesome reflections on past troubles, and fears of the future; and moreover animates them in the practice of these actions whereby not only their own good, but that of the societies wherein they live, is finally promoted; all attempts to rob them of this hope are highly malicious, and import no less than a conspiracy against the happiness of mankind, and the good of the society wherein they live: And therefore we may say assuredly, that as those *mortal Deists* are much incommoded by their own opinion; so that their attempt for its propagation, must be looked on as proceeding from no good design to the rest of mankind.

Here perhaps some of them may say, that this opinion tends to liberate a great part of mankind from the disquieting fears of *future misery*.

To this I answer, 1. I believe it true, that their fears of *future misery* are uneasy to them; or they have but little hope of *future felicity*. Their way of living allows them none. But these fears proceed from conscience of guilt, and are the genuine result of actions, equally destructive to the actors, and the interest of the rest of mankind. 2. These fears have their use, and serve to deter from such evils as are ruinous to the persons who commit them, to human society. 3. While this opinion liberates a few of the worst of men, from these fears, which are part of the just punishment of their villainies, and emboldens them to run on in those evils which ruin themselves and others, it dispirits and discourages the only useful part of mankind, by filling them with dismal thoughts of *annihilation*. 4. Nor can all that the Deists are able to do, liberate themselves or mankind from those fears. The utmost that they can pretend, with any show of reason, is, that we have no ground to believe such a state. Will this make us sure that there is one? But of this we have said enough in the introduction.

By what has been said it is evident, what judgment we are to make of this sort of Deists. Their lives, writings and death, show them to be mere Atheists.

Vaninus, when first he appeared and wrote his *Amphitheatrum Providentiæ Divinæ*, set out for such a one that believed a God. But at

length spoke out plainly that he believed none, and was deservedly burnt for *Atheism* at Thoulouse, April 9, 1619. He confessed there were twelve of them that parted in company from Naples to teach their doctrine in all the provinces of Europe.*

Uriel Accosta wrote for this opinion, as himself tells us in his *Exemplar Vitæ Humanæ*, which is subjoined to *Limburg's* conference with *Orobias* the Jew.† His last action tells what man he was. After he had made a vain attempt to shoot, his brother, he discharged a pistol into his own breast. This fell out about the twentieth or thirtieth year of the last century. So they live, and so they die.

Were this our design, or if we saw any need of it, we might give such an account of the principles, practices, and tragical exits of not a few of this sort of persons, as would be sufficient to deter the sober from following them. But what has been said is sufficient to discover the destructive tendency of their *prime opinion*. And further we shall not concern ourselves with them, but go on to that which is mainly intended in this discourse.

CHAPTER III.

Wherein the controversy betwixt us and the Immortal Deists is stated and cleared.

THE *Immortal Deists*, who own a *future state*, are the only persons with whom it is worth while to dispute this point about the sufficiency of natural religion. Before we offer any arguments on this head, it is necessary we state the question clearly; and it is the more necessary, that none of the Deists have had the courage or honesty to do it. And here in the entry we shall lay down some things, which we think are not to be controverted on this occasion. And we shall, after these concessions are made, inquire what still remains in debate.

1. We look on it as certain, that all the world, in all ages, hath been possessed of some notion of a God, or some power above them, on whom, in more or less, they did depend; and to whom on this account, some respect is due. This heathens have observed. Cicero, amongst others, hath long since told us, "That there is no nation so barbarous that owns not some god, that has not some anticipations or impressions from nature, of a God."‡ Nor is this any more, than what we are told, Rom. i. 19, 20, &c., that the Gentiles have some notions of truth concerning God, which they hold in unrighteousness; that God, partly by erecting a tribunal in their own breasts, which they cannot decline, though they never so much would, and partly by presenting to their eyes those visible works that bear a lively impress of his *invisible power* and *Godhead*, hath, as it were, forced upon them the knowledge of some part of that, which the Apostle calls *γνωσθὲν τοῦ Θεοῦ*, or *that which may be known of God*. Whence they all in some measure knew God, though they glorified him not as God.

* See Great Geographical Dictionary.

† Limburgi Præfatio & Respons. Urielis Accostæ Libro.

‡ Cicero de Natura Deorum, Lib. i.

The stories some have told us of nations that have no notion of a God, upon search are found false. And for some lewd persons, who have pretended to a settled persuasion, they are not to be credited. We have sufficient reason to look on them as liars, or at least, not admit them witnesses in this case.

2. I do think that the knowledge of some of the more obvious laws of nature, and their obligation, hath universally obtained.* The Gentiles, all of them, *do by nature those things*, that is, the material part of those duties, which the law of nature enjoins, which shows the work of the law, or some part of it at least, to be written in their hearts, since they do some things it enjoins. I do not think that this writing of the law imports innate ideas, or innate actual knowledge, which Mr. Locke hath been at so much pains to disprove,† with what success I inquire not now. Some think, that while he grants the self-evidence of a natural propensity of our thoughts toward some notions, which others call innate, he grants all that the more judicious intend by that expression. Others think that Mr. Locke's arguments conclude only the improbability of *innate ideas*, and that they are to be rejected, rather for want of evidence for them, than for the strength of what is said against them.‡ But whatever there is as to this, neither the Apostle's scope nor words oblige us to maintain them. What is intended may be reduced to two assertions, viz. That men are born with such faculties, which cannot, after they are capable of exercising them, but admit the obligation and binding force of some, at least, of the laws of nature, when they are fairly offered to their thoughts; and, that man is so stated, that he cannot miss occasions of thinking of, or coming to the knowledge of those laws of nature. "*Homines nasci cognitione aliqua Dei instructos, haud licimus: nullam omnino habent, sed vi cognoscendi dicimus; neque ita naturaliter cognoscunt atque sentiunt, infitam potentiam Deum cognoscendi, ad cultum ejus aliquo modo præstandum, stimulantem, ponte se in adultis rationis computibus, non minus certo et necessario ipsam ipsum ratiocinari, exerturam, unumquemque retinere, ratio nulla ut cur opinemur cum sentiamus,*" says the learned Dr. Owen.§

3. It is unquestionable, and has been sufficiently attested by the nations, and even by some of the worst of them, that man has a *conscience*, that sometimes drags the greatest and most obstinate offenders to its tribunal, in their own breasts, accuses them, condemns them, and in some sort executes the sentence against them, for their counteracting known duty, how little soever they know. A heathen poet could say,

— Prima est hæc ultio, quod se
Judice nemo nocens absolvitur, improba quamvis
Gratia fallacis præloris viccrit urnam.||

* I inquire not whether they were acquainted with the proper and true grounds of the obligation of those laws they owned obligatory.

† Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, Book 1. chap. 4. § 11.

‡ Becconsall of Nat. Relig. chap. 6. § 1, 2.

§ Theologumen. Lib. i. c. p. 5. part 2.—"We do not say that men are born with any actual knowledge of God, as they have no knowledge at all when they are born; but we say that they are born with a capacity of knowing him, and that they do not naturally know as they feel this implanted capacity of knowing God, which stirs them up to worship him in some manner. And that this capacity will no less naturally and spontaneously exert itself in all adults that are possessed of reason, than that of reasoning itself, there is no reason why we should deliver as an opinion, as we feel it to be the case."

|| This is the first part of the punishment, that every guilty person is condemned by himself, although wicked interest should have overcome the integrity of his judge.

4. We own that those laws of nature, which are of absolute necessity to the support of government and order in the world, and the maintenance of human society, are, in a good measure, knowable by the light of nature, and have been generally known.

5. We willingly admit that, what by tradition, and what by the improvement of nature's light, many of the wiser heathens have come to know, and express many things excellently, as to the nature of God, man's duty, the corruption of nature, a future state, &c., and some of them have lived nearer up to the knowledge that they had than others: for which they are highly to be commended, and I do not grudge them their praise.

6. I look on it as certain, that the light of nature, had it been duly improved, might have carried them in these things, and others of the like nature, further than ever any went.

But after all these things are granted, the question concerning the *sufficiency of natural religion*, remains untouched.

For clearing this, it is further to be observed, that, when we speak of the sufficiency of natural religion, or those notices of God, and the way of worshipping him, which are attainable by the mere light of nature, without revelation, we consider it as a *mean* in order to some *end*. For by sufficiency is meant, that *aptitude* of a *mean* for compassing some *end*, that infers a necessary connection betwixt the due use, that is, such an use of the mean, as the person to whom it is said to be sufficient, is capable to make of it, and the attainment of the end.

Now natural religion, under this consideration, may be asserted sufficient or not, according as it is looked at with respect to one end, or another: for it is useful to several purposes, and has a respect to several ends.

1. It may be considered with respect to *human society*, upon which religion has a considerable influence. "There could never possibly be any government settled among Atheists, or those who pay no respect to a Deity. Remove God once out of heaven, and there will never be any gods upon earth. If man's nature had not something of subjection in it to a Supreme Being above him, and inherent principles obliging him how to behave himself toward God, and toward the rest of the world, government could have never been introduced, nor thought of. Nor can there be the least mutual security between governors and governed, where no God is admitted. For it is an acknowledging of God, in his supreme judgment over the world, that is the ground of an oath; and upon which the validity of all human engagements do depend," says an excellent person.* And the famed Cicero expresses himself very fully to the same purpose. Speaking of religion and piety, he says,—*Quibus sublatis, perturbatio vitæ sequitur, et magna confusio, at que haud scio, an pietate adversus Deos sublata, fides etiam, et societas humani generis, et una excellentissima virtus, justitia tollatur.*† If the question concerned this end, we might own natural religion some way sufficient to be a foundation for human society, and some order and government in the world; for it is in fact evident, that where revelation has been wanting,

* See Ch. Wolseley's *Unreas. of Atheism*, p. 152, &c.

† *De Natura Deorum*, Lib. i. mihi. p. 5.—"Which being taken away, a great disorder and confusion in life must follow; and I know not whether, after piety to the gods is taken away, truth and the social affections, and justice, the most excellent of the virtues, would not at the same time be taken away."

there have been several well formed governments. Though still it must be said, that they were obliged to tradition for many things that were of use, and to have recourse to *pretended revelation*, where the *real* was wanting.* Which shows revelation necessary, if not to the being, yet to the well-being of society.

2. Natural religion may be considered in its subserviency to God's moral government of the world ; and with respect to this, it has several considerable uses, that I cannot enter upon the detail of. It is the measure of God's judicial proceedings, with respect to those of mankind who want revelation ; and as to this, there is one thing that is usually observed, *that it is sufficient to justify God in punishing sinners*. That God sometimes, even here in time, punishes offenders, and, by the forebodings of their consciences, gives them dreadful presages of a progress in his severity against them, after this life, cannot well be denied. Now certainly there must be some measure, whereby God proceeds in this matter. *Where there is no law there is no transgression*. Punishments cannot be inflicted, but for the transgression, and according to the tenor of a law. And this law, if it is holy, just, and good in its precept, and equal in its sanction, is not only the measure whereby the governor proceeds in punishing offenders ; but that which justifies him in the punishment of them. It is needless to speak of the grant of rewards in this case ; because with respect to them not only justice, but grace and bounty have place, which are not restricted to any such nice measures in the dispensation of favors, as justice is in the execution of punishments. Now if natural religion is considered with respect to this end, we say it is sufficient to justify God, and fully clear him from any imputation of injustice or cruelty, whatever punishments he may, either in time or after time, inflict upon mankind who want revelation. There are none of them come to age, who—1. Have not fallen short of knowing many duties, which they might have known. 2. Who have not omitted many duties, which they knew themselves obliged to. And 3. Who have not done what they knew they ought not to have done, and might have forborne. If these three are made out, as no doubt they may be against all men, I do not see what reason any will have to implead God either of hardship or injustice.

There are I know, who think it very hard, that those natural notices of God and religion should be sufficient to justify God in adjudging those who counteract them, to future and eternal punishments, while yet such an attendance to, and compliance with them as men are capable of, in their present circumstances, is not sufficient to entitle us to *eternal rewards*.

But if, in this matter, any injustice is charged upon God, who shall manage the plea ? Shall they who transgress and contravene those notices do it ? But what injustice meet they with, if they are condemned for not knowing what they might have known ? not doing what they were obliged to do, and were able to do ? and for doing what they might and should have forborne ? If all these may be laid to their charge, though there were no more, what have they to say for themselves, or against God ? They surely have no reason to complain. If any have reason to complain, it must be they who have walked up to the natural notices of God. But where is there any such ? We may spare our

* See Amyrald on Religion, part 2. cap. 8.

vindication till such a one be found. Nor is it easy to prove that man's obedience though perfect, must necessarily entitle to eternal felicity. And he who shall undertake to implead God of injustice upon the account of such a sentence, as that we now speak of, will not find it easy to make good his charge.

Were the difficulty thus moulded, That it is hard to pretend that those natural notices of God are sufficient to justify God in condemning the transgressors of them to future punishments, while punctual compliance with them is not sufficient to save those, who yield this obedience, from those punishments, which the contraveners are liable to for their transgression,—though it were thus moulded, it would be a hard task to make good such a charge. But I am not concerned in it; nor are any, who judge the persons, who have gone farthest in this compliance, liable upon other accounts; because they still own their compliance so far available to them, as to save them from those degrees of wrath, which deeper guilt would have inferred.

3. Other ends there are, with respect to which natural religion may be considered, which I shall pass without naming, and shall only make mention of that which we are concerned in, and is aimed at in the present controversy, and that is, the *future happiness of man in the enjoyment of God*. This certainly is the supreme and ultimate end of religion with respect to man himself. For that the glory of God is the chief end absolutely, and must, in all respect, have the preference, I place beyond debate. Now it is as to this end, that the question about the sufficiency of natural religion is principally moved. And the question, in short, amounts to this, Whether the notices of God and religion, which all men by the light of nature have, or at least by the mere improvement of their natural abilities without revelation, may have, are sufficient to direct them in the way to eternal blessedness, satisfy them that such a state is attainable, and point out the way how it is to be attained; and whether by that practical compliance with those notices, which man in his present state is capable of, he may certainly attain to acceptance with God, please him, and obtain this eternal happiness in the enjoyment of him? The Deists are for the affirmative, as we shall afterwards make appear, when we consider their opinions more particularly.

But before we proceed to offer arguments, it will be needful to branch this question into several particulars that are included in it, that we may the better conceive of, and take up the import of it, and how much is included and wrapt up in this assertion. The question which we have proposed in general, may be turned into these five subordinate queries:—

1. Whether, by the mere light of nature, we can discover an eternal state of happiness, and know that this is attainable? Unless this is done nothing in matters of religion is done. It is impossible that nature's light can give any directions as to the means of attaining future happiness, if it cannot satisfy us that there is such a state.

2. Whether men, left to the conduct of the mere light of nature, can certainly discover and find out the way of attaining it? that is, Whether by the light of nature, we can know and find out all that is required of us, in the way of duty, in order to our eternal felicity? If the affirmative is chosen, it must be made appear by nature's light, what duties are absolutely necessary to this purpose; that those which are prescribed are indeed duties; and that they are all that are necessary in order to

the attainment of the end, if they are complied withal. Although we should have it never so clearly made out, that there is a future state of happiness, yet if we are left at an utter loss as to the means of attaining it, we are no better for the discovery.

3. Whether nature's light gives such a full and certain discovery of both these as the case seems to require? Considering what a case man at present is in, to hope for an eternity of happiness, is to look very high: and any man, who in his present circumstances, shall entertain such an expectation, on mere surmises, suspicions and may-be's, may be reproached by the world, and his own heart, as a fool. To keep a man up in the steady impression, and expectation of so great things, conjectures, suppositions, probabilities and confused general hints, are not sufficient. Again, there are huge difficulties to be surmounted in the way to this blessedness, which are obvious and certain. Sensible losses are sometimes to be sustained, sensible pains to be undergone, and sensible dangers to be looked in the face. Now the question is, Whether is here such a clear and certain knowledge of these attainable, as the importance of the case, the stress that is to be laid on them, and the dangers that are to be encountered for them, requires? Certain it is, it will not be such notices as most please themselves with, that will be able to answer this end.

4. Whether the evidence of the attainableness of a future state of happiness, and of the way to it, is such as suits the capacities of all concerned? Every man has a concernment in this matter. The Deists enquire after a religion that is able to save all, whereof every man, if he but please, may have the eternal advantage. Now then the question is, Whether the case is so stated, as that every man, who is in earnest, if he has but the use of his reason, however shallow his capacity is, how great soever his inevitable entanglements and hinderances from close application are, may attain to this certainty about this end, and the way to it? For it must be allowed that there is a vast difference among men as to capacity. Men are no more of one measure in point of intellectual abilities, than in stature. That may be out of the reach of one, which another may easily attain to. Now, may as much be certainly known by the meanest capacity as is necessary for him to know? Again, all men have not alike leisure. That may be impossible to me, if I am a poor man, obliged to work hard to earn my own and family's bread, which would not be so if I had leisure and opportunity to follow my studies. Now, if these discoveries, both as to their truth, certainty and attainableness, are not such as the meanest, notwithstanding any inevitable hinderances he may be under, may reach, they will not answer the end.

5. Whether, supposing all the former, every man, however surrounded with temptations, and inveigled with corrupt inclinations, or other hinderances, which he cannot evite, is yet able, without any supply of supernatural strength, to comply so far with all those duties, as is absolutely needful in order to obtain this eternal happiness? Whatever our knowledge is, we are not the better for it, unless we are able to yield a practical compliance.

The Deists have the affirmative of all these questions to make good. How they acquit themselves in this, we shall see afterwards. The task, as any one may see, is sufficiently difficult. And I do not know, that any one of them who has yet wrote, hath given any evidence that they

understood the state of the question in its full extent. They huddle it up in the dark, that the weakness of their proof may not appear. And perhaps they are not willing to apply their thoughts so closely to the subject, as is requisite, in order to take up the true state of the controversy.

The more remiss and careless they have been this way, we had so much the more to do to state the question truly betwixt us and them. And having done this, we shall next proceed to make good our part of it.

A negative is not easily proven, which puts us at some loss. It has been denied that it can in some cases be proven. But we hope, in this case, we are able to offer such reasons as will justify us in holding the negative in this debate. And we shall see next whether they are able to demonstrate the affirmative, and offer as good reasons for it, as we shall give against it. And it is but reasonable they should offer better, in a matter of so great concern.

CHAPTER IV.

Proving the Insufficiency of Natural Religion, from the Insufficiency of its Discoveries of a Deity.

THOUGH it belongs to the assertors of the *sufficiency of natural religion*, to justify by argument their assertion, and we who are upon the negative, might supersede any further debate until such time, as we see how they can acquit themselves here : yet truth, not triumph, being the design of our engaging in the contest, that none may think we are without reason in our denial, and that we put them upon the proof, only to difficult them, we shall now by some arguments endeavor to evince the insufficiency of natural religion.

The first argument I shall improve to this purpose is deduced from the insufficiency of those discoveries, which the light of nature is able to make of God. Nothing is more plain than this, that religion is founded upon the knowledge of the Deity ; and that our regard for him will be answerable to the knowledge we have of him. That religion therefore which is defective here is lame with a witness : and if nature's light cannot afford such notices of the Deity, as are sufficient or necessary to beget and maintain religion amongst men, then it can never with any rational man be allowed sufficient to direct men in religion.

Now, for clearing this argument, several things are to be discoursed. And first of all, it is requisite, that we state such a notion of religion in general, as may be allowed to pass with all, who are, or can reasonably, be supposed competent judges in such matters. Religion then, in general, may be justly said to import *that veneration, respect or regard, which is due from the rational creature in his whole course of life, to the supreme supereminently excellent Being, his Creator, Preserver, LORD or Governor, and Benefactor.*

The actions of the rational creature, which may come under the notion of religion, are of two sorts : some of them do directly, properly and immediately import a regard or respect to God as their end ; which they are immediately and properly designed to express. Such acts are

called *acts of worship*. And religion is more eminently thought to consist in these, and that not without reason. Yea, by some it is wholly, and against all reason, confined to them, and circumscribed within those bounds. Again, there are other actions, which, though they have other more proper, direct and immediate ends, on account whereof they undergo various denominations, yet they also are, or may be, and certainly should be subordinate to that, which, though it is not the proper, most immediate, and distinguishing end of these actions, yet is the common and ultimate end, at which all a man's actions should be leveled. Now all the actions of a rational creature, which are of this last sort, as referred to a Deity, and importing somewhat of religion, may be termed acts of moral obedience. In so far they are religious, and come within the compass of our consideration, as they express any respect to God. And they express and import regard to God, in as far as they quadrate with the moral law, which is the instrument of God's moral government of the world; and therefore if they are right and agreeable to this rule, they may be termed acts of moral obedience, to distinguish them from these acts, which are solely and more strictly religious, and are called acts of worship.

But to speak somewhat more particularly of this regard that is due to God, it is as evident as any thing can, that it must be,

1. In its *formal nature* different from that respect, which we may allowably pay to any creature; that is, it must be given on accounts no way common to him with any of the creatures, but on account of those distinguishing excellencies, which are his incommunicable glory. None can reasonably deny this, since it must be allowed by all, that religious respect due to God, and civil respect due to creatures are different, and must be principally differenced by the grounds whereon the respect to the one or other is paid. Now the grounds whereon this homage is due unto the Deity, are, the supereminent, nay, infinite excellency of his nature and perfections, and his indisputably supreme, absolute and independent sovereignty over all his creatures, which stands eternally firm and unshaken, as being supported by that supereminency of his excellency, his creation, preservation, and benefits. Now none of these grounds are, in any degree, communicable to the creatures; and so to talk of a religious worship due to the creature, is to speak nonsense with a witness.

2. This veneration we give to God must be intensively, or as to degree, not only superior to that which we give to any creature, but even supreme. It is not enough, that we love God on accounts peculiar to him; but we must love him with a love superior to that which we give any creature, and answerable to those accounts, whereon we do love him. And the like may be said as to other instances. There is no need of insisting in the proof of this. Would our king be pleased, if we paid him no more respect than we do his servant? Is the distance betwixt God and the highest creature less considerable, than that which is betwixt a king and his meanest subject? Nay, is it not infinitely more? How can it then reasonably be expected that the same degree of respect we pay to the creatures, will find acceptance, or answer the duty we owe to the glorious and ever-blessed Lord God?

3. This veneration must be *extensively* superior to that paid to any of the creatures. Our regard to the Deity must not be confined to one

sort of our actions, (those, for instance, which are religious in a strict sense, or more plainly, acts of worship ;) but it must run through every action of our life, inward and outward. Every action is a dependent of God's, and owes him homage. It is otherwise with men ; for to one sort of men, we may owe respect, in one sort of our actions, and owe them none in another. A child, in filial duties, owes his father respect ; as a subject, he owes his governor reverence ; and so of other instances of a like nature : but to no one creature is he, in all respects, subject, or obliged by every action to express any regard. And the reason is plain ; he is subject to none of them in all respects wherein he is capable of acting. But, with respect to God, the matter is quite otherwise: Whatever he has is from God, and to him he is in all respects subject, on him he every way depends. The power your father has over you, he derives from God, and it is God that binds the duties you are to pay your father on you ; and therefore God is to be owned as supreme, even in every act of duty that you perform to your father, your king, your neighbor, or yourself: for you are in all respects *his*. While you are subordinate on various accounts to others, yet still God is in every regard supreme and sovereign Lord and disposer of you and your actions, and therefore you owe him a regard, in every thing you think, speak or do. I think this plain enough.

I hope this account of the nature of religion in general, will not be found liable to any considerable exceptions, it being no other than such as the first view of the nature of the thing offers to any that seriously consider it. And from this account it is evident, that religion is founded on the knowledge of a Deity. A blind devotion that is begot and maintained either by profound ignorance of God, or confused notions of him, answers neither man's nature, which is rational, and requires that he proceed in all his actions, especially those of most moment, rationally, that is, with knowledge and willingness ; nor will it obtain acceptance, as that which answers his duty, whereby he is obliged to serve God with the best and in the highest way that his faculties admit him. The contrary supposition of Papists is a scandalous reproach to the nature, both of God and man ; and an engine suited only unto the selfish design of the villainous priests, who, that they may have the conduct of men's souls, and so the management of their estates, have endeavored to hoodwink man, and make him brutish, where he should be most rational ; and that they may have the best, they make him present God with the blind and the lame, which his soul abhors.

This being, in general, clear, that the knowledge of God is the foundation of all acceptable religion, it is now proper to inquire what discoveries of God are requisite to bring man to such a religion, as has been above described, and to keep him up in the practice of it. Now if we look seriously into this matter, I think we may lay down the following position, as clear beyond rational contradiction.

1. That a *particular knowledge of God is requisite to this purpose*, to beget and maintain this reverence for the Deity, which is his undoubted due. It is not enough that we have some general notions, however extensive. To conceive of God in the general, that he is the best and greatest of beings, *optimus maximus*, is not enough. The reason is obvious: we must have in every sort of actions, nay, in each particular action, that knowledge which may influence and guide us to that respect,

which is due to him, in that sort of actions, or that particular one, but this general notion having no more respect to one than another, will not do. It directs us no more in one than another, unless the particulars that are comprehended under that general be explained to, and understood by the actor.

2. *That knowledge, which will answer the end, must be large and comprehensive.* This religion is not to be confined to one particular sort of actions, but to run through all, and therefore there must be a knowledge, not merely of one or two perfections of the divine nature, but of all; not simply, as if God were to be comprehended, but of all those perfections and prerogatives of God, which require our regard in our particular actions, in so far as they are the ground of our veneration. As for instance, to engage me to *trust* God, I must know his power, his care and knowledge; to engage me to pray to him, I must be persuaded of his knowledge, of his willingness and power to assist me in the suit I put up; to engage me to love him, I must know the amiableness of his perfections; to engage me to pay him obedience, I must know his authority, the laws he has stamped it on, and that he has fixed a law to these particular actions, either more general or more special. Whence it being evident, that different actions require different views of God in order to their regulation; and all a man's actions being under rule, there must be a large and comprehensive knowledge of God to guide him in his whole course.

3. It being no less than an universal religion that is to be sought after, the discoveries of God wherein it must be founded, must be plain to the capacities of all mankind; and that both as to the truth of these discoveries and their use. It is certain that all men are no more of the same measure of understanding than they are in stature. However important the discovery is, if it is above my reach, it is all one to me as if it were not discovered at all. To tell me of such a thing, but it is in the clouds, is to amuse and not to instruct me. There may indeed, supposing an universal religion, be somewhat of difference as to knowledge allowed, as to some of the concerns of this religion, to persons of more capacity and industry, and who have more time; but if it is calculated for the good of all mankind, the discoveries must be such, as all who are concerned may reach, as to all its essentials; for the meanest have as much concernment in them as the greatest.

4. It is most evident, that these discoveries must be certain, or come recommended by such evidence as may be convincing and satisfying to every mind. Conjectural discoveries, or surmises of these things, built upon airy and subtle speculations, are not firm enough to establish such a persuasion of truth in the soul, as may be able to influence this universal regard, over the belly of the strongest inward bias and outward rubs.

5. *The evidence of these things must be abiding;* such as may be able to keep up the soul in a constant adherence to duty. It is not one day that man is to obey, but always; and therefore these discoveries must lie so open to the mind at all times, as that the soul may by them be constantly kept up in its adherence to duty. If from any external or internal cause, there may arise such obstructions as may for one day keep man from those discoveries, or the advantage of them; he may ruin, nay, must ruin himself by failing in his duty; or at least, if he is not ruined, he is laid open to it.

6. Upon the whole it appears, that to found natural religion, or to introduce and maintain among men that regard which is due to the Deity, there is requisite such a large, comprehensive, certain, plain, and abiding discovery, as may have sufficient force to influence to a compliance with his duty in all instances.

Thus far matters seem to be carried on with sufficient evidence. We are now come to that which seems to be the principal hinge, whereon the whole controversy, about the *sufficiency of natural religion*, turns; in so far at least, as it is to be determined by this argument. Now this is, whether nature's light can indeed afford such discoveries of God, as are evinced to be necessary for the support of religion? If it cannot, then it is found insufficient; if it can, then natural religion is thus far acquitted from the charge laid against it. Now to attempt the decision of this question successfully, it is necessary that we state it right. It is not then the question, whether in nature there is sufficient objective light? as the schools barbarously speak; that is, whether in the works of creation and providence, which lie open to our view, or are the object of our contemplation, there are such prints of God, which, if they were all fully understood by us, are sufficient to this purpose? For the question is not concerning the works of God without us, but concerning us. The plain question is this, "Whether man can, from those works of God alone, without the help of revelation, obtain such a knowledge of God, as is sufficient to the purpose mentioned?"

Now the question being concerning our power, or rather the extent of our power, I know but four ways that can be thought upon to come to a point about it: either,

1. By *divine revelation* we may be informed what nature's light unassisted can do. We would willingly put the matter on this issue: our adversaries will not; so we shall leave it. or,

2. Some apprehend that the way to decide this, is, to take our measures from the *nature of God*; and to inquire, when God was to make or did frame man, with what powers it was proper for him to endue him? or, with what extent of power, considering the infinite wisdom, goodness and power of the Creator? This way the Deists would go. But, 1. It seems a little presumptuous for us to prescribe, or measure what was fit for God to do, by what appears to us fit to have been done. For when we have soared as high as we can, we must fall down again; for God's counsels are too deep for us, and if we should think this or that fit for God, yet he having a more full view of things, may think quite the contrary; and thus all that we can come to here in this way, is but a weak and presumptuous conjecture. 2. If in fact, what we think fit, or conjecture fit for God to have done, it be evident that God has not done; that he has given no such power or extent of it, as we judge necessary, our judgment is not only weakly founded, but plainly false; yea, and impious to boot: for if God has done otherwise, it is certain that the way which we prescribed was not best; nor can we hold by our own apprehension, whatever shows it is built on, without an implicit charge of folly against God. 3. Whatever we may pretend the wisdom of God requires to be done for, or given to man, if by no divine act there is any evidence that he has so done, though there be no proof of his having done the contrary, yet it weakens the evidence of all we can say, if the thing is such in its nature, as would be known by experience, if

existent ; because, in that case, the whole stress of our argument leans upon a supposition that we are capable of judging of the wisdom of God, while it is certain, we have not all those circumstances under our view, which may make it really fit to act this way rather than that, or that way rather than this, which on the other hand he certainly has. This way then we cannot decide the case.

3. We may immediately perhaps judge of the extent of man's ability in this sort, by a direct inquiry into the nature of the powers. But this way is as uncertain as the former ; for there is no agreement amongst the most judicious about the nature of those powers, without endless controversies. And all that are really judicious own such darkness in this matter, that will not allow them to pretend themselves capable to decide the question this way. It is little we know of the nature, or powers, or actings of spirits : nor do I believe that ever any person that understands, will pretend to decide, the controversy this way. Wherefore,

4. We must, upon the whole, give over the business, or inquire into the extent of our ability by *experience* ; and judge what man can do by what he has done. If not one has made sufficient discoveries of God, it is rash to say that any one can by the *mere light of nature* make them : more especially it will appear so, if we consider, that all mankind must be pretended equally capable of these discoveries, which concern their own practice. It is strange to pretend that all are capable of doing that which none has done. Further, these discoveries are not of that sort that may be sufficient to answer their end, if one in one age shall make some steps towards them, and another afterwards improve them : but it is necessary that every one, in every age, and at every period of life, have exact acquaintance with them ; in so far as is needful to regulate his practice in that period of his life. When I am in one station, I must either fail in the respect due to God, and so lay myself open to *justice*, or I must know as much of God as is requisite to influence a due regard in that station, or that part of my life that now runs ; and therefore a universal defect as to those discoveries must inevitably overthrow the *pretended ability* of man to make these discoveries, and consequently the *sufficiency of nature's light* to beget or maintain religion, which cannot be supported without them.

Now for clearing this matter, it is to be considered, that what we are upon is a negative, and it belongs to those who affirm man able to make such discoveries of God, to show by whom and where these discoveries have been made, or to produce those notices of God that are built on the *mere light of nature*, that are sufficient to this purpose. Now none of them dare pretend this has been done, or, at least, show who has done it, or make the attempt themselves ; and therefore we might take it as confessed, that it is not to be done.

But if it is still pretended, that this has been done, though without telling us by whom, or pointing to these discoveries where we may find them ;

I answer, how shall we know this ? May we know it by the effects of it, in the lives of those, who either have had no other light save that of nature, as it was with the philosophers of old before Christ, or who own none other save that of nature, as the Deists and others who rejected Christianity ? Truly if we judge by this rule, we are sure the negative

will be much confirmed? For it is plain that those notions of a God, which were entertained by the philosophers of old, influenced none of them to *glorify him as God*. The vulgar heathens were void of any respect to the *true God*; nay, by the whole of their practice bewrayed the profoundest ignorance, and the most contemptuous disregard of him. The philosophers, not one of them excepted, whatever notions they had of a Deity, and whatever length some of them went in *morality, upon other inducements*, yet showed nothing like to that *peculiar, high, and extensive respect to the one true God* which we now inquire after. We may bid a defiance to the Deists, to show us any thing like it in the practice even of a Socrates, a Plato, a Seneca, or any others of them. Their virtue was plainly built upon another bottom. It has been judiciously observed by one of late, that there was little notice taken of God in their ethics; and I may add, as little regard in their practice. Nor are the lives of our Deists, or others since, any better proof of the sufficiency of the natural notices of God, to beget and support a due veneration for him.

If the Deists decline this trial of the sufficiency of those discoveries of a God, by their influence upon practice, then we must look at them in themselves. And here we must have recourse, either to those who had no acquaintance with the Scripture revelation; or to those who have given us accounts of God amongst ourselves; who though they own not the Scriptures to be from God, yet have had access to them, for the improvement of their own notions about God. The last sort might be cast, as incompetent witnesses in this case, upon very relevant grounds. But we shall give our enemies all that they can desire, even as to the advantage they may have this way, that they may see our cause is not wanting in evidence and certainty.

We begin then with those who have been left to the *mere light of nature*, to spell out the letters of God's name, from the works of *creation and providence*, without any acquaintance with the more plain Scripture account of God. Now what we have to say as to them, we shall comprise in a few observations.

1. As for the attainments of the *vulgar heathens*, there is no place for judging of them otherwise than by their *practice*. They have consigned nothing to writing, and so we have no other way to guess at their opinions in matters of religion, but either by their practice, or by ascribing to them principles of those, who in their respective countries, had the disposal of these matters. Whichsoever way we consider the matter, it must be owned that the vulgar heathens were stupidly ignorant as to the truths of religion. If we make their practice the measure of judging, which in this case is necessary, none can hesitate about it. If we make the principles and knowledge of their leaders the standard, whereby we are to judge of their attainments, and make a suitable abatement, because scholars must always be supposed to know less than their masters, I am sure the matter will not be much mended, as the ensuing remarks will in part clear.

2. As to the philosophers, if I had time and opportunity to present in a body or system all that has been said, not by one of them, but by all the best of them put together, it would put any one that reads, to wonder, that they, "who were such giants," as an excellent person

speaks, "in [all other kinds] of literature, should prove such dwarfs in divinity, that they might go to school to get a lesson from the most ignorant of Christians that know any thing at all."* Any one that will but give himself the trouble to peruse their opinions about God, as they lie scattered in their writings, or even where they are proposed to more advantage by those, who have collected and put them together, will soon be convinced of how low a stature their divinity was, and how justly the Apostle Paul said, that by *their wisdom they knew not God*. All their knowledge of God was no more than plain and gross ignorance, of which the best of them were not ignorant, and therefore Thales, Solon, Socrates, and many others, spoke either nothing of God at all, or that which was next to nothing. And it had been well for others, if they had done so too; what they spoke, not only falling short of a sufficient account, but presenting most abominable and misshapen notions about God; of which we have a large account in *Cicero de Natura Deorum*.†

3. Besides that endless variety amongst different persons, in their opinions about the Deity, which is no mean evidence of their darkness, even the very same persons, who seem to give the best accounts, are wavering and uncertain, say and unsay, seem positive in one place, and immediately in the very next sentence seem to be uncertain and fluctuating. Thus it is with them all, and thus it usually is with persons who are but groping in the dark, and know not well how to extricate themselves.

4. They who go farthest, have never adventured to give any methodical account. They wanted materials for this; and therefore give but dark hints here and there. *Cicero*, who would make one expect such an account, while he inscribes his book *De Natura Deorum*, yet establishes scarce any thing; but spends his time in refuting the opinion of others, without daring to advance his own.‡

5. They who have gone farthest are too narrow in their accounts, they are manifestly defective in the most material things. They are all reserved about the number of the gods. It is true the best do own that there is one *Supreme*; but then there is scarce any of them positive that there are no more gods save one. No not Socrates himself, who is supposed to die a martyr for this truth, durst own this plainly. And while this is undetermined, all religion is left loose and uncertain; and mankind cannot know how to distribute their regard to the several deities. Hence another defect arises, and that is about the *supereminency* of the *divine excellencies*. Although the Supreme Being may be owned superior in order; yet the inferior deities being supposed more immediate in their influence, this will substract from the Supreme Deity much

* See Char. Wolseley's Reasonableness of Scripture Belief.

† Cicero, Lib. i. P. 4. *Qui vero Deos esse dixerunt, tanta sunt in varietate ac dissensione constituti, ut eorum molestum sit annumerare sententias. Nam de figuris Deorum et de locis atque sedibus et actione vita, multa dicuntur, &c.*—"But those who have affirmed that there are gods, have gone into so great a variety and difference of opinion, that it is difficult to enumerate their sentiments, for many things are said by them concerning the shapes of the gods, their places, habitations, and manner of life."

‡ *De Natura Deorum*, Lib. ii. *An inquit, oblitus es quod initio dixerim, facilius me talibus de rebus, quod non sentirem quam quod sentirem dicere posse.*—"Have you forgot that I told you at the beginning, that I could more easily tell you what I did not think, than what I thought of these matters!"

of his respect, and bestow it elsewhere. Moreover, about God's *creating power* their accounts are very uncertain, few of them owning it plainly. Nor are any of them plain enough about the special providence of God, without which it is impossible to support religion in the world.

6. As their accounts are too narrow, so in what they do own they are too general. But will this maintain religion? No, by no means. But there must be a particular discovery of these things. Well, do they afford this? Nay, so far are they from explaining themselves to any purpose here, that industriously they keep in dark generals. The Divine excellencies, unless it be a few negative ones, they do seldom attempt any explication of. His providence they dare not attempt any particular account of. The extent of it to all particular actions is denied by many of their schools, owned distinctly by few, if any; but particularly cleared up by none of them.* The laws whereby he rules men are no where declared. When some of them are insisted on in their ethics, the authority of God in them, which is the only supreme ground of obedience, and that which alone can lay any foundation for our acceptance in that obedience at God's hand, is no where taken notice of. The holiness of the Divine nature, which is the great restraint from sin, is little noticed, except where some of the more abominable evils are spoke of. The goodness of God as a rewarder, is not by any of them cleared up. And yet upon these things the whole of religion hangs, which by them are either wholly passed over, or mentioned in generals, or darkened by explications that give no light to the generals; at least, and for most part, are so far from explaining, that they obscure, nay corrupt them, by blending pernicious falsehoods with the most valuable truths.

7. The discoveries they offer are not for the most part proven, but merely asserted. Their notions are most of them learned from tradition, and they were, it would seem, at a loss about arguments to support them. Where the greatest certainty is required, least is found.

8. Where they do produce arguments, as they do sometimes, for the being and providence of God in general, they are too dark and nice, both in matter and manner, to be of any use to the generality of mankind.

To have produced particular instances for the justification of each of these observations, would have been too tedious. Any one that would desire to be satisfied about them, may be fully furnished with instances, if he will give himself the trouble to peruse *Cicero de Natura Deorum*, *Diogenes Laertius' Lives of the Philosophers*, or *Stanley's Lives*; but especially the writings of the several philosophers themselves concerning this subject. Nor will this task be very tedious, if he is but directed to the places where they treat of God: for they insist not long on this subject, and the better and wiser sort of them are most sparing.

When I review these observations, which occurred by my reading the works of the Heathens, and their opinions concerning God, I could not

* ——— *Doctrinam de providentia rerum particularisive gratia a veteribus (quatenus eorum libri qui extant, collegi potest) remissius credi observamus: Herbert de Veritate, p. 271, 272.*—"We observe that the doctrine of universal providence and particular grace was but faintly believed by the ancients, so far as can be collected from their books."

but admire the gross inadvertency, to give it no worse word, of the Deists, (and more especially of the late Lord Herbert, who was a man of learning and application) who pretend that the knowledge of those general attributes of God, his greatness and goodness, vulgarly expressed by *Optimus Maximus*, are sufficient; since it is plain from what has been said, 1. That *this general knowledge* is of no significancy to influence such a peculiar, high and extensive, practical regard to the Deity, as the notion of religion necessarily imports. Of which even Blount was, it seems, aware, when he confesses in his *Religio Laici*, that there is a necessity that his articles must be well explained. 2. It is plain that the philosophers, and consequently the common people, did not understand well the meaning of those articles, or of those general notions concerning God, at least, in any degree answerable to the end we have in view.

I dare submit these observations, as to their truth, to any impartial person, who will be at pains to try them, upon the granting of a twofold reasonable demand. 1. That he will consult either the authors themselves, or those, who cannot be suspected of any bias, by their being Christians, which I hope Deists will think just; such as Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, &c. or those who have made large collections, not merely of their general sentences concerning God; but of their explications. In which sort Stanley excels. 2. I require that, in reading the authors, that they do not lay hold on a general assertion, and so run away, without considering the whole of what the authors speak on that head. The reasons why I make these demands, are, first, some persons designing, for one end or other, to illustrate points in Christianity with quotations from Heathen authors, take up general expressions, which seem congruous with, or may be the same, which the Scripture uses, without considering how far they differ, when they both descend to a particular explication of those general words. Again, some Christians, writing the lives of the philosophers, and collecting their opinions, are misled by favor to some particular persons, of whom they have conceived a vast idea, and therefore either suppress or wrest what may detract from the person they design to magnify. M. Dacier, for instance, has written the life of Plato: but that account is the issue of a peculiar favor for that philosopher's notions in general; and it is evidently the aim of the writer to reconcile his sentiments to the Christian religion. A work that some others have attempted before. To this purpose Plato's words are wrested, and such constructions put on them, as can no other way be justified, but by supposing that no material points of the Christian religion could be hid from Plato, or his master Socrates. And yet after all, Plato's gross mistakes, and that in matters of the highest import; yea, and such of them, as are supposed, generally, to lie within the reach of nature's light, are so obvious and discernible, that the evidence of the thing extorts an acknowledgment. To give but one instance; after the writer has made a great deal ado about Plato's knowledge of the *Trinity*,* a story which has been oft told, but never yet proven, it is plainly acknowledged, that he speaks of the *Three Persons* of the Deity as of three Gods, and three different principles; which is, in plain terms, to throw down all that was built before, and prove that Plato knew neither the *Trinity*, nor the *one true God*. Finally, general

* M. Dacier's Life of Plato, p. 141.

sentences occur in those authors, which seem to import much more knowledge of God, than a farther search into their writings will allow us to believe they had : for any one will quickly see, that in those general expressions, they spoke as children that understood not what they say, or at least, have but a very imperfect notion of it. And though this may seem a severe reflection on these great men ; yet I am sure none shall impartially read them, who will not own it just.

But now, to return to our subject, this sufficient discovery of God not being found amongst those, who were strangers to the Scriptures and Christianity, let us next proceed to consider those, who have had access to the Scriptures, and lived since the Christian religion obtained in the world. And here it must be owned, that since that time philosophers have much improv'd natural theology, and given a far better account of God, and demonstrated many of his attributes from reason, that were little known before, to the confusion of Atheists. From the excellent performances of this kind, which are many, I design not to detract. I am content that a due value be put on them : but still I am for putting them only in their own place, and ascribing no more to them, than is really their due. Wherefore, notwithstanding what has been now readily granted, I think I may confidently offer the few following remarks on them.

1. We might justly refuse them, as no proper measure of the ability of unassisted reason, inasmuch as it cannot be denied, that the light, whereby those discoveries have been made, was borrowed from the Scriptures : of which none needs any other proof than merely to consider the vast improvement of knowledge, as to those matters, immediately after the spreading of Christianity, which cannot, with any show of reason, be otherwise accounted for, than by owning that this light was derived from the Scriptures, and the observation and writings of Christians, which made even the heathens ashamed of their former notions of God. But not to insist on this.

2. Who have made those improvements of natural theology ? Not the heathens or Deists. It is little any of them have done this way. The accurate systems of natural theology have come from Christian philosophers, who do readily own that the Scripture points them, not only to the notions of God they therein deliver, but also to many of the proofs likewise, and that their reason, if not thus assisted, would have failed them as much, as that of the old philosophers did them.

3. It is worthy our observation, that such of the Christians, who favor the Deists most, such as the Socinians and some others, do give most lame and defective accounts of God. They who lean much to *reason*, their reason leads them into those mistakes about the nature and knowledge of God, which tend exceedingly to weaken the *practical influence* of the notion of a God. And we have reason to believe that the Deists will be found to join with them, in their gross notions of God, as ignorant of the free actions of men, before they are done, and as not so particularly concerned about them in his providence, with many such like notions, which sap the foundations of all practical regard to God.

4. But let the best of these systems be condescended on, they cannot be allowed to contain sufficient discoveries of God. For it is evident beyond contradiction, that they are neither full enough in explaining what they in the general own, nor do they extend to some of those things

which are of most necessity and influence to support *practical religion*. They prove a providence, but cannot pretend to give any such account of it, as can either encourage or direct to any dependence on, trust in, or practical improvement of it. And the like might be made appear of other perfections. Again, they cannot pretend to any tolerable account of the remunerative bounty, the pardoning mercy and grace of God, on which the whole of religion, as things now stand, entirely hangs. Can they open these things so far as is necessary to hold up religion in the world? They who know what religion is, and what they have done, or may do, will not say it.

5. In their proofs of these truths, there must be owned a want of that evidence, which is requisite to compose the mind in the persuasion of them, and establish it against objections. Let Scripture light be laid aside, which removes objections; and let a man have no more to confirm him of those truths save these arguments, the difficulties daily occurring from obvious providences, will jumble the observer so, that he will find these proofs scarcely sufficient to keep him firm in his assent to the truths; and if so, far less will they be able to influence his practice suitably against temptations to sin. Now this may arise, not so much from the *real weakness* of the arguments, which may be conclusive, as from this, that most of them are rather drawn *ab absurdo*, than from any clear light about the nature of the object known; and hence there comes not that light along, as to difficulties, which is necessary to remove them. And though these arguments silence in dispute, and close the adversary's mouth; yet they do not satisfy the mind. Moreover, some of no mean consideration, have pretended that many of these demonstrations, even as to some of the most considerable attributes of God, are inconclusive: particularly they have asserted, that the unity of God was not to be proven by the light of nature, nor special providence. But not to carry the matter thus far, it is certain that the force of these demonstrations must lie very secret, that such persons who owned the truths, and bore them good will, yet could not find it.

Much more might be said on this head, but I am not willing to invalidate these arguments, or even to show all that might, perhaps, not only be said, but made appear against them. But whatever there is as to this, it is certain that the discoveries of God by nature's light being small, are easily clouded, by entangling difficulties arising from the dark occurrences of providence, and the natural weakness and unstaidness of our minds, which are always to be found in matters sublime, and not attended with strong evidence. And attention in this case will increase the darkness, and force on such an acknowledgment as Simonides made to Hiero, the tyrant of Syracuse, That "the longer he thought about God, the more difficulty he found to give any account of him." -

6. They must, whatever be allowed as to their validity in themselves, be owned to be of no use to the generality; nay, to the far greater part of mankind. No man who knows them, and knows the world, will pretend that the one half of mankind is able to comprehend the force of them. And so they are still in the dark about God; which quite everts the whole story about the sufficiency of the natural discoveries of a Deity.

7. It is plain, that there is no serving God, walking with or worshipping of him, without thoughts, and serious ones too, of him. Now his nature and excellencies are infinite, how then shall we conceive of them?

Our darkness and weakness will not allow us to think of him as he is, and conceive those perfections as they are in him. And to conceive otherwise is dangerous. We may mistake in other things without sin; but to frame wrong, and other conceptions of God and his excellencies, than the truth of the thing requires, is dangerous and sinful; for it frames *an idol*. Now though this difficulty may be easy to less attentive minds; yet it will quite confound persons who are in earnest, and understand what they are doing in their approaches to God. Nor can ever the minds of such be satisfied in our present state, otherwise than by God's telling us, how we are to conceive of him, and authorizing us to do it in a way of condescension to our present dark and infirm state.

8. I cannot forbear to notice, as what wants not its own weight in this case, though in condescension we did a little waive arguments drawn from the *practical influence of truths*, that however great the improvements, as to notions of truths concerning the nature of the Deity may of late have been, yet the effects of these notices in their highest improvement, have been far from recommending them, as sufficient to the end we have now in view. *This natural theology* has rather made men more learned than more pious. Where Scripture truth has not been received in its love and power, men have seldom been bettered by their improvements in natural theology. But we see in experience, that they who can prove most and best in these matters, evidence least regard to the Deity in their practice.

I shall add one observation more, which at once enforces the argument we are upon, against the sufficiency of natural religion, and cuts off a pretended retortion of it, against the Christian religion; and it is this: the religion the Deists plead for, and are obliged to maintain, is a religion that pleads acceptance on its own account, which has no provision against guilt and escapes, as shall be demonstrated hereafter; a religion which consequently must be more perfect, and so requires a more exact knowledge of the Deity in order to its support: whereas, the Christian religion is one which is calculated for man in his fallen state; and the *fall* is everywhere in it supposed, and a gracious provision made against defects in knowledge, and unallowed practical escapes.

CHAPTER V.

Proving the Insufficiency of Natural Religion from its defectiveness as to the Worship of God.

THE argument we are to improve against the *sufficiency of natural religion* in this chapter, might have been considered as a branch of the foregoing: but, that we may be more distinct, and to show a regard unto the importance of the matter, we shall consider it as a distinct argument by itself.

Now therefore, when we are to speak of the worship of God, it is not of that inward veneration that consists in acts of the mind, such as esteem, fear, love, trust, and the like; but of the outward, stated, and solemn way of expressing this *inward veneration*. That there should

not only be an inward regard to the Deity in our minds, influencing the whole of our outward deportment ; but that besides, there should be fixed, outward, and solemn ways of exercising and expressing these inward actings, seems evident beyond any reasonable exception,—

1. From the general agreement of the world in this point. All the world has owned some worship necessary. Every nation and people had their peculiar way of worship.* It is true, most of them were ridiculous, many of them plainly wicked, and all of them vain ; but this makes not against the thing in general ; only it bespeaks the darkness of nature's light, as to the way of managing in particulars, that which in general it directs to.

2. The Deists themselves own this much. Herbert in his treatise, *de Religione Gentilium*, confesses it a second branch of the generally received religion, for which he pleads, *that God is to be worshipped*. It is true, in his next, while he tells us that virtue and piety were owned to be the *principal means of worshipping* him, he would seem to preclude us from the benefit of the former acknowledgment. But yet he dares not assert, that this which he condescends on was the *only way*, and so pretend the worship we speak of *unnecessary* ; but being to hold forth *the sufficiency of this natural religion*, he was loth to speak any more of that, which would lead him, if he had considered it, unto a discovery of its nakedness. But others of the Deists do own the necessity of such a worship, and pretend prayer and praise sufficient to this purpose, as he also doth in his other treatises, particularly *de Veritate*.†

3. The same reasons which plead for inward acts, peculiarly directed to this end, plead for outward veneration likewise. If we have minds capable of this inward veneration, so are we capable of outward expressions ; and are under the same obligation to employ those latter sorts of powers to the honor of God, that binds us to the former. Nor is there more reason why, besides that transient regard we ought to pay him in all our actions, there should be inward acts peculiarly designed to express our inward veneration, than that there should be outward stated acts, peculiarly designed for the same purpose.

4. *The nature of society pleads loudly for this*. Mankind as united in societies, whether lesser, as families, or greater, as other societies, depend entirely on God ; and therefore owe him reverence, and the expression of it in some joint and fixed way. Public benefits require public acknowledgements : and this sort of dependence on, and subjection to the Deity, should certainly have suitable returns.

5. It is uncontrollably evident, that many in the world do shake off all regard to the Deity, and walk in an open defiance to him, and those laws which he has established. Certainly therefore, it is the duty of such as keep firm, openly to testify their dependence on and regard to the Deity, which is not sufficiently done by the performance of those things, which are materially according to the appointment of God. For what regard to God there is, influencing to those outward acts, cannot be clearly discerned by on-lookers, who know not but somewhat, beside

* Herbert de Veritate, p. 271, 272.

† Herbert de Veritate, p. 272.—*Nos interea externum illum Dei cultum (sub aliqua religionis specie) ex omni seculo regione, gente evicimus.*—"In the mean time we have proved this external worship of God, under some appearance of religion, from every age, country, and nation."

any regard to the authority of the lawgiver, may be at the bottom of all. It is therefore necessary that there be public, solemn actions, directly and plainly importing our avouchment of a regard to him, in opposition to these affronts that are publicly offered to him.

6. *This worship* is necessary in order to maintain and cherish that *inward veneration*. It is well known, however much we are bound to it, yet the sense of this obligation, and that veneration itself to which we are obliged, is not so deeply rivetted upon our minds, but it needs to be cherished, and the habits strengthened by actings. It is not so easy for men to do this by inward meditation, who for most part are little accustomed to this way, and can indeed scarce fix their minds in this inward exercise at all, especially if they have no fixed way of exercising it, but are left at liberty to choose their own way. Religion therefore must go out of the world, or, there must be stated and fixed ways of exercising it. This is easily justifiable from experience, which shows, that where once public worship is disregarded, any other sort of respect to the Deity quickly falls of its own accord.

7. *It is necessary for the benefit of human society*. The foundations of human society are laid upon the notion of a God, and the sacredness of oaths, and the fixed notions of right and wrong, which all stand and fall together. Nor is there any way of keeping that regard to those things, which are the props of human society, without such a worship of God, as that we plead for. This all the lawgivers were of old satisfied about, and took measures accordingly.

8. If religion has any valuable end, then certainly this must be one main part of it, to lead man to future happiness; which cannot, with any show of reason, be alleged to consist in any thing besides the enjoyment of God. And it is plainly ridiculous to suppose, that mankind can be kept up in any fixed expectation of, or close pursuit after this, if not animated and encouraged by some, nay frequent experiences of commerce betwixt him and the Deity here. And it is foolish to pretend, that this is otherwise to be had, in any degree answerable to this end, in any other way than in the way of designed, fixed, solemn and stated worship.

Now this much being said in the general for clearing the necessity of such a worship, and the importance of it in religion; it remains that we prove *the light of nature insufficient* to direct us as to the way of it. And this we conceive may be easily made to appear from the ensuing grounds.

1. The manifest mistakes all the world fell into, who were left in this matter to the conduct of the mere light of nature, abundantly evince the incompetency of nature's light for man's direction, with respect to the worship of God. Every nation had their own way of worship, and that stuffed with blasphemous, unworthy, ridiculous, ungrounded, impious, and horrid rites and usages; of which there are innumerable accounts every where to be met with. We can no where in the heathen world find any worship that is not manifestly unworthy of, and injurious to the glorious God. Surely *that light* that suffered the world to lose their way so evidently, must be sadly defective. Their worship was every where such, even where wise men were the institutors of it, that it could not satisfy any person who had any true notion of God; and was the scorn of the wise and discerning. Nor can it with any show of reason be pleaded, that these defects and enormities are to be charged, not on

the *defectiveness of nature's light*, but the *negligence* of those who did not use it to that advantage it might have been used ; since it has been above proven, that the only way we can judge what nature's light can do, is by considering what it has done somewhere or other. And these enormities did every where obtain : they were not peculiar to some places ; but wherever men were left to the light of nature, there they fell into them.

2. These ways of worship, viz. *prayer and praise*, which are condescended upon by the Deists, and seem in general to have the countenance of reason ; yet, as they are discovered by nature's light, can no way satisfy. Be it granted that nature's light directs to them in general, and binds them on us as duty ; yet it must be allowed, that this is not enough ; for the difficulty is, how we shall in particular manage them to the *glory of God*, and our own advantage. The duty is stated in the general, and when we begin to think of compliance with it, we find the light of nature, like the Egyptian task-masters, set us our work, and demand brick, while yet it allows us no straw. What endless difficulties are we cast in, about the matter of our prayers and praises ? What things shall we pray to God, and praise him for ? How shall we be furnished with such discoveries of the nature, excellencies, and works of God ; and what things are proper for us, as may be sufficient to guide us in our prayers and praises, and keep us up in a close attendance on these duties in the whole tract of our lives, without wearying or fainting ? Are we, because we know not what is good or ill for us, to hold in mere generals, as the best of the philosophers thought ? If so, will the mind of man, for so long a tract of time, be able to continue in this general way, without nauseating ? Or, shall we descend to particulars ? If so, how shall materials be furnished to us for such particular addresses, who know so little of God's works, or our own wants ? Again, who shall teach us the way and manner of praying and praising, which will be acceptable to God ? Shall every one's fancy be the rule ? If there be a fixed rule, which, and where is it ? Again, what security have we from the mere light of nature, as to the success and acceptance of these duties ? It will be to no advantage to except, that God requires of us no more than he has directed us in ; for this is to beg the main question. Were it once granted, that no more is required than what nature's light directs to, there might be some countenance for this plea, that what it gives no directions in, will not be insisted upon by God ; but this is plainly refused, and so the difficulties remain. Nor is it to more advantage to pretend, that the substance being agreed to, God will not insist upon circumstances of worship : for the difficulties objected respect not merely the circumstances, but the very substantial parts of these duties. As to what may be pretended of the influence of the hopes of eternal life, toward the keeping up men in attendance on duties ; as to the particular manner of the performance of which, and the grounds of acceptance, they are entirely in the dark. This plea shall be fully considered afterwards. As it is obvious, that no general supposal of benefit can for any long tract of time keep men steady in the performance of actions, about the nature and acceptance of which they are in doubt ; so, it shall be made to appear there is no ground from the mere light of nature for any such hope of future felicity, as can relieve in this case.

3. The plain confession of the more thoughtful, wise and discerning of the heathen world, plainly proves this.* The followers of the famed Confucius in China, though they own that there is one Supreme God, yet profess themselves ignorant of the way in which he is to be worshipped, and therefore think it safer to abstain from worshipping, than err in the assignation of improper honor to him. Plato in his second Alcibiades, which he inscribes "Of Prayer," makes it his business to prove, "That we know not how to manage prayer;" and therefore concludes it "safer to abstain altogether, than err in the manner." Alcibiades is going to the temple to pray, Socrates meets him, dissuades him, and proves his inability to manage the duty, of which he is at length convinced; whereupon Socrates concludes, "You see, says he, that it is not at all safe for you to go and pray in the temple—I am therefore of the mind, that it is much better for you to be silent.—And it is necessary you should wait for some person to teach you how you ought to behave yourselves, both towards the gods and men. To which Alcibiades said, and when will that time come, Socrates? And who is he that will instruct me? With what pleasure should I look on him? To which he replies, he will do it who takes a true care of you. But methinks, as we read in Homer, that Minerva dissipated the mist that covered Diomedes, and hindered him from distinguishing a God from a man; so it is necessary, that he should in the first place scatter the darkness that covers your soul, and afterwards give you these remedies that are necessary to put you in a condition of discerning good and evil; for at present you know not how to make a difference. Alcibiades says, I think I must defer my sacrifice to that time. Socrates approves—You have reason, says he; it is more safe so to do, than run so great a risk.† The famed Epictetus was so much of the same mind, that he knew no way but to advise every one to follow the custom of their country in worship."‡ Upon the same account Seneca rejects all this worship. And memorable is the confession of Jamblichus, a Platonic philosopher, who lived in the fourth century—"It is not easy to know what God will be pleased with, unless we be either immediately instructed by God ourselves, or taught by some person whom God hath conversed with, or arrive at the knowledge of it by some divine means or other."§ Thus you see how much these great men were bemisted in this matter, and may easily conclude what the case of the rest of mankind was.

4. The very nature of the thing seems to plead against the *sufficiency of reason* in this point: for it seems plainly to be founded on the clearest notions of nature's light, that the worship of God is to be regulated by the will and pleasure of God; which, if he reveal not, how can we know it? Hence it was that the heathens never pretended reason but always revelation for their worship. The governors all of them did this. And Plato tells us, "That laws concerning divine matters must be had from the Delphic Oracles."||

Much more might be said on this head, were it needful: but I am apprehensive this is a point that the Deists will not be fond to dispute with us; not only because they are no great friends to this worship, but

* Hornbeck de Conversione Gentilium, Lib. 5. cap. 6. p. 47.

† We have the same account of Socrates and Xenophen; of which Stanley, p. 75.

‡ Epictet. Enchirid. cap. 38.

§ Seneca Epis. 95. Jambl. de Vita Pythag. cap. 28.

** Plato de Legibus.

because they can say so little on this head, which has any show of reason: of which their famed leader Herbert, was sufficiently aware, when he tells us in his third article, *that virtue is the principal worship of God*; whereby he owns, that there is indeed another part of, which he dare not name, because he knows not what to say about it.

CHAPTER VI.

Proving the insufficiency of Natural Religion, from its defectiveness as to the discovery wherein man's happiness lies.

NEXT to the *glory of God*, the indisputably *supreme end* of man, and of the whole creation, of which I am not now to discourse, *the happiness of man*, is, past all peradventure, *his chief end*. Yea, perhaps, if we speak properly, except as above said, it is his *only end*. For whatever man is capable of designing, is comprehended under this, being either what doth, or at least is judged to contain somewhat of happiness in it, or what is supposed to contribute to that wherein satisfaction is understood to consist. Every thing a man aims at, is either aimed at as good in itself, or contributing to our good. The first is a part of our happiness; the last is not in proper speech so designed, but the good to which it contributes, and that still is as before a part of our happiness. If religion is therefore any way useful or sufficient, it must be so with respect to this end. And since religion not only claims some regard from man, but pleads the preference to all other things, and demands his chief concern, and his being employed about it as the main business of his life, it must either contribute more toward this end, than any thing else, may be able to lead man to this end, otherwise it deserves not that regard which it claims, and is indeed of little, if any use to mankind. If then we are able to evince that natural religion is not sufficient to lead man to that happiness, which all men seek, and is indeed the chief end of man, there will be no place left for the pretence of its sufficiency, in so far as it is the subject of this controversy betwixt the Deists and us. And this we conceive may be made to appear many ways. But in this chapter we shall confine ourselves to one of them.

If nature's light is not able to give any tolerable discovery of that wherein man's happiness lies, and that it may by him be obtained, then surely it can never furnish him with a religion that is able to conduct him to it. This cannot with any show of reason be denied. It remains therefore that I make appear, *that nature's light is not able to discover wherein man's happiness lies, and its attainableness*. Now this I think is fully made out by the following considerations:

1. They who, being left to the conduct of the mere light of nature, have sought after that good wherein man's happiness is to be had, could not come to any agreement or consistency among themselves. This is a point of the first importance, as being the hinge whereon the whole of a man's life must turn; the spring which must set man a-going, and give life to all his actions, and to this they must all be directed. This, if any other thing ought to be easily known; and if nature's light is a sufficient guide, it must give evident discoveries of. But, methinks, here

is a great sign of a want of this evidence ; great men, learned men, wise philosophers and industrious searchers of truth have split upon this point, into an endless variety of opinions ; insomuch that Varro pretends to reckon up no less than 288 different opinions. May I not now use the argument of one of the Deists, in a case which he falsely supposes to be alike, and thus in his own words argue upon this point, (only putting in, *the discoveries of nature's light about happiness or the evidence of those discoveries*, in place of *the evidence of the reasons of the Christian religion*, against which he argues) : " If the discoveries of it were evident, there could be no longer any contention or difference about the chief good ; all men would embrace the same and acquiesce in it : no prejudice would prevail against the certainty of such a good."* " It is every man's greatest business here to labor for his happiness, and consequently none would be backward to know it. And, if all do not agree in it, those marks of truth in it are not visible, which are necessary to draw an assent."† But whatever there is in this, it is a most certain argument of darkness, that there is so great a difference, where the searchers are many, it is every one's interest to find, and the business and search is plied with great application.

2. The greatest of the philosophers have been plainly mistaken in it. They espoused opinions in this matter, which are not capable of any tolerable defence. Solon, the Athenian lawgiver, defined them " happy who are competently furnished with outward things, act honestly, and live temperately."‡ Socrates held, that there was but one chief good, which is *knowledge*, if we may believe Diogenes Laertius in his life. Aristotle, if we may take the same author's words for it, places it in virtue, health, and outward conveniency, which no doubt was his opinion, since he approved Solon's definition of the chief good ;§ and herein he was followed by his numerous school. Pythagorus tells us, that the " knowledge of the perfections of the soul is the chief good." It is true, he seems at other times to speak somewhat differently ; of which we may speak afterwards. Zeno tells us, that it lies in " living according to nature." Cleanthes adds, that " according to nature is according to virtue." Crysippus tells us, that it is to live according to expert knowledge of things which happen naturally.¶ It is needless to spend time in reckoning up innumerable others, who all run the same way, placing happiness in that which is not able to afford it, as being finite, of short continuance, fickle and uncertain. It is not my design to confute those several opinions. It is evident to any one, that they are all confined to time, and upon this very account fail of what can make us happy.

3. They who seem to come nearer the matter, and talk sometimes of *conformity to God* being the *chief good* ; that it is *our end* to be like God, and the like ; as Pythagoras and some others ;¶ but especially Plato, who goes farther than any of the rest ;** yet cannot justly be alleged to have made the discovery, because we have not any account of their opinions clearly delivered by themselves, but hints here and there gathered up from their writings, which are very far from satisfying us as to their mind. Besides they are so variable, and express

* Oracles of Reason, p. 206.

† Stanley, p. 26. Life of Solon, cap. 9.

‡ Stanley, p. 462.

¶ Ibid. p. 541.

† Ibid. p. 201.

§ Stanley, p. 540.

** Ibid. p. 192. cap. 8.

themselves so differently, in different places, that it is hard to find their mind ; nay I may add, they are, industriously and of design obscure.— This, Alcinous the Platonic philosopher, tells us plainly enough in his *Doctrine of Plato*, which is inserted at length in *Stanley's Lives*. He says, “that he thought the discovery of the *chief good* was not easy, and if it were found out, it was not safe to be declared.”— And that for this reason, he did communicate his thoughts about it to very few, and those of his most intimate acquaintance. Now the plain meaning of all this, in my opinion is, that he could not tell wherein man's happiness consists, or what that is which is able to afford it : or at most, that though one way or other in his travels, by his studies or converse, he had got some notions about it ; yet he did not sufficiently understand them, and was not able to satisfy himself or others about them, and that therefore, he either entirely suppressed, or would not plainly speak out his thoughts, least the world should see his ignorance, and that though his words differed, yet in very deed he knew no more of the matter than others. For to say, that, upon supposition that his discoveries had been satisfying, as to truth and clearness, and that he was capable to prove and explain them, they were not fit to be made known to the world, is to speak the grossest of nonsense ; for nothing was so necessary to be known, and known universally, as the *chief good*, which every one is obliged to seek after. To know this, and conceal the discovery, is the most malicious and invidious thing that can be thought of. And rather than charge this on Plato, I think it safer to charge ignorance on him. He speaks somewhat liker truth than others, while he tells us, “That happiness consists in the knowledge of the chief good ; that philosophers, who are sufficiently purified, are allowed after the dissolution of their bodies, to sit down at the table of the gods, and view the field of truth ; that to be made like God is the chief good ; that to follow God is the chief good.” Some such other expressions we find. But what does all this say ? Does it inform us that Plato understood our happiness to consist in the *eternal enjoyment of God* ? Some, who are loth to think that Plato missed any truth of importance which is contained in the Scripture, think so : but for my part, I see no reason to convince me from all this that Plato understood anything tolerably about the *enjoyment of God*, either in time or after time, or that he was fixed and determined wherein the happiness of man consists, or that really any such state of future felicity is certainly attainable. All this was only a heaven of his own framing and fancy, fitted for philosophers ; for the being of which, he could give no tolerable arguments. And all this account satisfies me no more that Plato understood wherein happiness consists, than the following does, that he knew the way of reaching it, which I shall transcribe from the same chapter of *Alcinous' Doctrine of Plato* : “Beatitude is a good habit of the genius, and this similitude to God we shall obtain, if we enjoy convenient nature, in our manner, education, and sense, according to law, and chiefly by reason and discipline, and institution of wisdom, withdrawing ourselves as much as possible from human affairs, and being conversant in these things only which are understood by contemplation : the way to prepare, and as it were, to cleanse the demon that is in us, is to initiate ourselves into higher disciplines ; which is done by music, arithmetic, astronomy and geometry, not without some respect of the body, by gymnastic, whereby it is made

more ready for the actions both of war and peace." I pretend not to understand him here : but this I understand from him, that one of three is certain, either he understood not himself, or had no mind that others should understand ; or that he was the most unmeet man in the world to instruct mankind about this important point, and to explain things about which the world was at a loss. When men speak at this rate, we may put what meaning we please upon their words.

4. It is plain that none of them have clearly come to know themselves, or inform others that *happiness is not to be had here*; that it *consists in the eternal enjoyment of God after time*; and that *this is attainable*. These are things whereabout there is a deep silence, not so much as a word of them, far less any proof. If ever we were to expect such a thing we might look for it from those who have not merely touched at this subject by-the-bye, and in dark hints, but have discoursed of moral ends on set purpose, such as Cicero and Seneca. Cicero frequently tells that he designed to enrich his native country with a translation of all that was valuable in the Greek philosophers, he had perused them for this end, and thus accomplished, he sets himself to write of moral ends, which he does in five books. Here we may expect somewhat to the purpose : but if we do, we are disappointed. The first book sets off Epicures' opinion about happiness with a great deal of rhetoric. The second overthrows it. The third represents the Stoic's opinion. And the fourth confutes it. The fifth represents and asserts the Peripatetic's opinion, which had been as easily overthrown as any of them. And this is all you are to expect here, without one word of God, the enjoyment of him, or any thing of that kind, which savors of a life after this. Seneca writes again a book *de Vita Beata* consisting of thirty-two chapters. Here we may find somewhat possibly. And indeed if one should hear him state the question, as he does in his second chapter he would expect some great matters from him. *Quaramus quid optime factum sit, non quid usitatissimum : et quid nos in possessione felicitatis æternæ constituat, non quid vulgo, veritatis pessimo interpreti, probatum sit. Vulgus autem tam chlamydatos, quam coronam voco.** What may we not now expect ? But after this, I assure you, you are to look for no more words about eternity, nor any thing more, but a jejune discourse in pretty sentences, about the Stoic's opinion, representing that a man would be happy, if his passions were extinct, and he was perfectly pleased with the condition he is in, be it what it will. Now after this, who can dream that nature's light is sufficient to satisfy here ? Is every man able to discover that which philosophers, the greatest of them, after the greatest application, failed so signally about, that scarcely any of them came near it, and none of them reached it ?

5. Nor will it appear strange, that the Heathen philosophers of old should be so much at a loss about future happiness, to any one who considers how difficult, if not impossible it must be for any, who rejects revelation, and betakes himself to the mere light of nature, to arrive at the wished for, and necessary assurance of eternal felicity after this life, even at this present time, after all the great improvements, which the

* Let us inquire what is best to be done, and not what is most common ; and what puts us in possession of eternal felicity, and not what is approved by the vulgar,—the worst judges of truth. By the vulgar I mean the rich and great men, as well as the mob.

rational proofs of a future state have obtained, since Christianity prevailed in the world. If nature's light, now under its highest improvements, proves unable to afford full assurance, and still leaves us to fluctuate in uncertainty about future happiness ; no wonder that they should be in the dark, who were strangers to these improvements.

That the arguments for a future state, since Christianity obtained, have received a vast improvement from Christian divines and philosophers, cannot modestly be denied. The performance of Plato and Cicero, on this point, which were the best among the ancients, are, when compared with our late Christian writers, but like the trifles of a boy at school, or the rude essays of a novice, in comparison to the most elaborate and complete performances of the greatest masters : if they bear even the same proportion. He who knows not this, knows nothing in these matters. Yea, to that degree have they improved those arguments, that it is utterly impossible for any man, who gives all their reasons for the continuance of the soul after death, with their answers to the trifling pretences of the opposers of this conclusion, a fair hearing and due consideration, to acquiesce rationally in the contrary assertion of Atheists and mortal Deists ; or not to favor, at least this opinion, as what is highly probable, if not absolutely certain.

But after all, if we are left to seek assurance of this from the unassisted light of nature, that *certainly God has provided for, and will actually bestow upon man, and more especially man who is now a sinner, future and eternal felicity*, we will find ourselves plunged into inextricable difficulties, out of which the light of nature will find it very difficult, if not impossible to extricate us. It is one thing to be persuaded of the future separate subsistence of our souls after death, and another to know in what condition they shall be ; and yet more to be assured, that *after death our souls shall be possessed of eternal happiness*. It is precisely about this last point that we are now to speak. The arguments drawn from nature's light will scarce fix us in the steady persuasion of future and eternal felicity. There is a great odds betwixt our knowledge of future punishments, and the grounds whereby we are led to it, and our persuasion of future and eternal rewards. Upon inquiry the like reasons will not be found for both. Our notices about eternal rewards, when the promises of it contained in the Scripture are set aside, will be found liable to many objections, hardly to be solved by the mere light of nature, which do not so much affect the proofs advanced for future punishments. Besides, since the entrance of sin, its universal prevalence in the world, and the consequences following upon it, have so long benighted man, as to any knowledge that he otherwise might have had about eternal happiness, that now it will be found a matter of the utmost difficulty, if not a plain impossibility, for him to reach assurance of eternal felicity by the mere light of nature, however improved.

The pleas drawn from the holiness and justice of God, say much for the certain punishment after this life, of many notorious offenders, who have wholly escaped punishment here ; especially as they are strengthened by other collateral considerations clearing and enforcing them.

But, whether the pleas for future and eternal rewards, from the justice and goodness of God, on the one hand ; and the sufferings of persons really guilty of sin, but in comparison of others virtuous, on the other ;

will with equal firmness conclude, that God is obliged to, or certainly will reward their imperfect virtues, and compensate their sufferings, may, and perhaps not without reason, be questioned.

That it is congruous that virtue should be rewarded, may perhaps easily be granted. But what that reward is, which it may from divine justice or bounty claim, it will not be easy for us to determine, if we have no other guide than the mere light of nature. The man who perfectly performs his duty is secured against the fears of punishment, and has reason to rest fully assured of God's acceptance and approbation of what is every way agreeable to his will. He has a perfect inward calm in his own conscience, is disturbed with no challenges, and has the satisfaction and inward complacency, resulting from his having acquitted himself according to his duty: his conscience assures him he has done nothing to provoke God to withdraw favors already given, or to withhold farther favors. And though he cannot easily see reason to think God obliged, either to continue what he freely gave, or accumulate farther effects of bounty upon him, or to protract his happiness to eternity; yet he has the satisfaction of knowing, that he hath not rendered himself unworthy of any favor. This reward is the necessary and unavoidable consequence of perfect obedience.

But this comes not up to the point. That which the light of nature must assure us of is, that virtuous men, on account of their virtue, may claim and expect, besides this, a farther reward, and that of no less consequence than eternal felicity. Now, if I mistake it not, when the promise of God, which cannot be known without revelation, is laid aside, the mere light of nature will find it difficult to fix upon solid grounds, for any assurance as to this. Many thorny difficulties must be got through. Not a few perplexing questions must be solved. If it is said that the justice of God necessarily obliges him, besides that reward necessarily resulting from perfect obedience, (of which above), farther to recompence, even the most exact and perfect performance of our duty, antecedently to any promise given to that effect, with future and eternal felicity; it may be inquired, how it shall be made to appear that virtue, suppose it to be as perfect as you will, can be said to merit, and to merit so great a reward? May not God, without injustice, turn to nothing an innocent creature? Sure I am, no mean nor incompetent judges have thought so.* Where is the injustice of removing or taking away what he freely gave, and did not promise to continue? Is it modest or false for us, without the most convincing evidences, of the inconsistency of the thing, to limit the power of God, or put a *cannot* on the Almighty? And does not the very possibility of the annihilation of an innocent creature, in a consistency with justice, though God, for other reasons, should never think fit to do it, entirely enervate this plea? If God, without injustice may take away the being of an innocent creature, how is it possible to evince, that injustice, he must reward it with eternal happiness? Again, if we may, for our virtue, claim eternal felicity, as due in justice, may it not be inquired, what exercise of virtue,—for how long a time continued,—is sufficient to give us this title to eternal rewards? If the bounty and goodness of God is insisted

* See the Excellency of Theology, &c., by T. H. R. Boil, p. 25, 26, 27, &c.; and Confid. about the Recon. of Reason and Rel. by T. E., p. 21, 22.

on, as the ground of this claim, the plea of justice seems to be deserted. And here again it may be inquired, whether the goodness of God is necessary in it? Whether the bounty of God ought not to be understood to respect those things which are absolutely at the giver's pleasure to grant or withhold? Whether, in such matters, we can be assured that bounty will give us this or that, which, though we want, is not in justice due, nor secured to us by any promise? Further, it may be inquired how far must goodness extend itself as to rewards? Is it not supposable, that it may stop short of eternal felicity, and think a less reward sufficient? Of so great weight have these, and the like difficulties appeared to not a few, and those not of the more stupid sort of mankind, that they have not doubted to assert boldly, that even innocent man, without revelation, and a positive promise, could never be assured of eternal rewards. And how the light of nature can disengage us from these difficulties, were man perfectly innocent, I do not well understand.

But whatever there is of this, the entrance of sin and the consideration of man's case as involved in guilt, has cast us upon new and yet greater difficulties. From this present condition wherein we find all mankind without exception involved, a whole shoal of difficulties emerge, ever, I am afraid, to be removed by unassisted reason.

Now, it may be inquired, what obedience is it that can entitle us to eternal felicity? If none save that which is perfect will serve, who shall be the better for this reward? Who can pretend to this perfect and sinless obedience? If imperfect obedience may, how shall we be free of this? How shall he who deserves punishment, claim, demand, and expect reward, a great reward, yea, the greatest reward,—eternal happiness? If the goodness of God is pleaded, and it is said, that though we cannot expect in strict justice to have our imperfect obedience rewarded; yet we may hope it from the bounty of God? Besides, what was above moved against this, in a more plausible case, when we were speaking of innocent man, it may be further inquired, whether, though infinite bounty might deal thus graciously with man, if he were perfectly righteous, it may not yet withhold its favors, or at least stop short of eternal felicity, with the best among sinners? Again, what degree of imperfection is it that will prejudice this claim? What may consist with it? Who is good in that sense, which is necessary to qualify him for this expectation? Is there any such person existent? What way shall we be sure of this? Is it to be measured by outward actions only, or are inward principles and aims to come in consideration? Who can show these save God? If it be said, we can know ourselves to be such: I answer, how shall we maintain any confidence of future, nay eternal rewards, while conscience tells that we deserve punishment? What if by the mere light of nature we can never be assured of forgiveness? How shall we then by it be sure of eternal rewards? If we are not rewarded here, how can we know but that it has been for our sins that good things have been withheld from us? May not this be presumed to be the consequence of our known sins, or more covert evils, which self-love has made us overlook? If we suffer, yet do we suffer more than our sins deserve, or even so much? If we think so, shall we be sustained competent judges of the quality of offences, and their demerit, which are done against God, especially when we are the

actors? To whom does it belong to judge? If ye meet with some part, for ye can never prove it is all, of demerit or deserved punishment of your sins here, will this conclude that ye shall be exempted from suffering what farther God may in justice think due to them, and you on their account hereafter? What security have ye that ye shall escape with what is inflicted on you here? And not only so, but instead of meeting with what ye further deserve, obtain rewards which ye dare scarcely say ye deserve? If God spare at present a noted offender who cannot without violence to reason be supposed a subject meet for pardon or for a reward, and reserve the whole punishment due to his crimes, to the other world; but in the mean while, sees meet to inflict present punishment on thee, though less criminal, perhaps to convince the world that even lesser offenders shall not escape; if, I say, he deal thus, is there no way for clearing his justice, but by conferring eternal happiness on thee? Why, if he inflict what further punishment is due to thee, in exact proportion to thy less atrocious crimes; and punish the other with evils proportioned to his more atrocious crimes; and make him up by the severity of the stroke for the delay of the punishment; if, I say, thus he do, I challenge any man to tell me where the injustice lies? And may not the like be said as to any other virtuous person, or whom thou supposest to be such, who meets with sufferings?

Nor do less perplexing difficulties attend those other pleas for future happiness to man, at lest, in his present condition; which are drawn from God creating us capable of future happiness, implanting desires, and giving us gusts of it: all which would be given in vain, if there was no happiness designed for man after time.

But how by this we can be secured of eternal happiness, I do not well see. Nor do I understand how the difficulties which may be moved against this, can be resolved. It may be inquired, whether this desire of happiness, said to be implanted in our natures, is really any thing distinct from that natural tendency of the creature to its own perfection and preservation, which belongs to the being of every creature, with such difference as to degrees and the manner, as their respective natures require? If it is no more than this, it must be allowed essential to every rational creature: and if every rational creature has an essential attribute, which infers an obligation on God to provide for it eternal happiness, and put it in possession of this felicity, if no fault intervene, doth it not thence necessarily follow, that God cannot possibly, without injustice, turn to nothing any innocent rational creature; nay, nor create any one, which it is possible for him again to annihilate without injustice? For if we should suppose it possible for God to do so, and thus without injustice frustrate this desire, where is the force of the argument? And is it not a little bold to limit God thus? I need not enter into the debate, whether there is any supposable case, wherein infinite wisdom may think it fit to do so? That dispute is a little too nice: for on the one hand, it will be hard for us to determine it positively, that infinite wisdom must, in any case we can suppose, think it fit to destroy or turn to nothing an innocent creature; and on the other hand, it is no less rash to assert, that our not knowing any case, proves that really there is none such known to the only wise God. Besides, if we allow it only possible, in a consistency with justice and veracity, for God to do it, I am afraid the argument has lost its force. Further, it may be inquired,

whether the rational creature can in duty desire an eternal continuation in being, otherwise than with the deepest submission to the sovereign pleasure of God, where he has given no positive promise? If submission belongs to it, all certainty vanishes, and we must look elsewhere for assurance of eternal happiness. A desire of it, if God see meet to give it, can never prove that certainly he will give it. If it is said, that the creature without submission or fault may insist upon and claim eternal happiness; I do not see how this can be proven.

But again, do not these desires respect the whole man, consisting of soul and body? Doth not death dissolve the man? Are not these desires apparently frustrated? How will the light of nature certainly infer from those desires, gusts, &c. that the whole man shall have eternal felicity, while we see the man daily destroyed by death? Can this be understood without revelation? Does the light of nature teach us that there will be a resurrection? I grant, that without the supposal of a future existence, we cannot easily understand what end there was worthy of God for making such a noble creature as man: but while we see man, on the other hand, daily destroyed by death, and know nothing of the resurrection of the body, which is the case of all those who reject revelation, we shall not know what to conclude, but must be tossed in our own minds, and be at loss how to reconcile those seeming inconsistencies: which gave a great man occasion to observe, "That there can be no reconciliation of the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, to be righteously administered upon a supposition of the separate everlasting subsistence of the soul only."* And for proof of this, he insists on several weighty considerations, which I cannot transcribe.

But, should we give up all this, will this desire of happiness prove that God designed it for man, whether he carried himself well or not? If it prove not that sinful man may be happy, or that eternal happiness is designed for man, who is now a sinner, what are we the better for it? Are we not all more or less guilty? What will it help us, that we were originally designed for, and made capable of future felicity, if we are now under an incapacity of obtaining it? Do we not find that we have fallen short of perfect obedience? And can those desires assure us that God will pardon, yea reward us, and that with the greatest blessing which innocent man was capable of? Moreover, before we end this discourse. I hope to make it appear, that by the *mere light of nature* no man can assuredly know that *sin shall be pardoned*; and if so, it is vain to pretend, that we can be assured of eternal felicity in our present condition. They who have sinned less and suffered more in this life, shall not be so severely punished in that which is to come, as they who have sinned more grievously and escaped without punishment here, this reason assures us of: but it can scarcely so much as afford us a colorable plea for eternal rewards, to any virtue that is stained with the least sin. The Scriptures make mention of a happiness promised to innocent man upon perfect obedience; and of salvation to guilty man upon faith in JESUS CHRIST. Beside these two I know no third sort. As to the last, the light of nature is entirely silent, as we shall see afterwards. Whether it can alone prove the first is a question: but that man in his present condition cannot be better for it, is out of question.

* Dr. Owen on Heb. vi. v. 1, 2. vol. 3, p. 21.

6. Were it granted that these arguments are conclusive, yet the matter would be very little mended: for it is certain, that these arguments are too thin to be discerned by the dim eyes of the generality, even though they had tutors who would be at pains to instruct them. Yea, I fear that they rather beget suspicions than firm persuasions in the minds of philosophers. They are of that sort, which rather silence than satisfy. Arguments *ab absurdo*, rather force the mind to assent, than determine it cheerfully to acquiesce in the truth as discovered. Other demonstrations carry along with them a discovery of the nature of the thing, which satisfies it in some measure. Hence they have a force, not only to engage, but to keep the soul steady in its adherence to truth; but these oblige to implicit belief as it were, and therefore the mind easily wavers and loses view of truth; and is no longer firm, than it is forced to be so, by a present view of the argument. If learned men were always observant of their own minds, and as ingenuous as the Auditor is in Cicero, in his acknowledgment about the force of Plato's arguments for the immortality of the soul,* they would make some such acknowledgment as he does. After he has told, that he has read oftener than once Plato's arguments for the immortality of the soul, which Cicero had recommended in the foregoing discourse as the best that were to be expected, he adds, "*Sed nescio quomodo, dum lego assentior: cum posui librum, et mecum ipse de immortalitate animorum capi cogitare, assentio omnis illa elabitur.*"† In like manner might others say, when I pore upon those arguments I assent; but when I begin to look on the matter, I find there arises not such a light from them, as is able to keep the mind steady in its assent. More especially will it be found so, if we look not only to the matter, but to the difficulties which offer about it. Yet this steadiness is of absolute necessity in this case, since a respect to this must be supposed always prevalent, in order to influence to a steady pursuit. The learned Sir Matthew Hale observes, that, "It is very true, that partly by universal tradition, derived probably from the common parent of mankind, partly by some glimmerings of natural light in the natural consciences, in some, at least, of the heathen, there seemed to be some common persuasion of a future state of rewards and punishments. But first it was weak and dim, and even in many of the wisest of them overborn; so that it was rather a suspicion, or at most, a weak and faint persuasion, than a strong and firm conviction: and hence it became very unoperative and ineffectual to the most of them, when they had greatest need of it; namely, upon imminent or incumbent temporal evils of great pressure. But, where the impression was firmest among them, yet still they were in the dark what it was."

7. It is further to be considered, that it is not the general persuasion that there is a state of future happiness and misery, which can avail;* but there must be a discovery of that happiness in its nature, or wherein it consists; its excellency and suitableness, to engage man to look on it as his chief good, pursue it as such, persevere in the pursuit over all opposition, and forego other things, which he sees and knows the present

* Cicero Tus. Quest. Lib. i.

† But I know not how it happens, that although I assent to him as long as I am reading, yet when I have laid down the book, and begun to think with myself of the immortality of the soul, all that assent vanishes.

‡ Herbert de Veritate, p. 52.

pleasure and advantage of, for it. Now, such a view the light of nature can never rationally be pretended to be able to give: if it is, let the pretender show us where, and by whom such an account has been given and verified; or let him do it himself. And if this is not done, as it never has, and I fear not to say never can be done; it would not mend the matter, though we should forego all that has been above said, (as was above insinuated), which yet we see no necessity of doing.

8. I might here tell how faintly the Deists use to speak upon this head. Though upon occasion, they can be positive; yet at other times they speak modestly about the being of a future state of happiness, and tell us "That rewards and punishments hereafter, though the notion of them has not been universally received, the heathens disagreeing about the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, may yet be granted to seem reasonable, because they are deduced from the doctrine of providence,—and that they may be granted parts of natural religion, because the wisest men have inclined them to hold them amongst the heathen,"* &c. and now do in all opinions. And as they seem not over certain as to the being of future rewards and punishments, so they plainly own they can give no account what they are. "*Qua vero, qualis, quanta, &c. hæc vita secunda vel mors fuerit ob defectum conditionum ad veritatus istius conformationem postulatarum, sciri nequit,*" says the learned Herbert.†

CHAPTER VII.

Nature's Light affords not a sufficient Rule of Duty. Its Insufficiency hence inferred.

THERE is certainly no other way of attaining happiness, than by pleasing God. Happiness is no other way to be had, than from him, and no other way can we reasonably expect it from him, but in the way of duty or obedience. Obedience must either be with respect to these things which immediately regard the honor of the Deity, or in other things. The insufficiency of natural religion as to worship, has been above demonstrated. That it is wanting as to the latter, viz. these duties which we called, for distinction's sake, *duties of moral obedience*, is now to be proven. That man is subject to God, and so in every thing obliged to regulate himself according to the prescription of God, has been above asserted, and the grounds of this assertion, have been more than insinuated. Now if nature's light is not able to afford a complete directory as to the whole of man's conduct, in so far as the Deity is concerned, it can never be allowed sufficient to conduct man in religion, and lead him to eternal happiness: while it leaves him at a loss as to sufficient rules for universal virtue, which even Deists own to be the principal way of serving God and obtaining happiness. It is one of the principal things to which this is to be ascribed, and whereon man's hopes must reasona-

* Oracle of Reason, p. 201.

† *De Ver.* p. 57, & *Alibi sapius*.—"But what, of what kind, and how great, this second life or death shall be, cannot be known, for want of those conditions that are required for the confirmation of the truth of it."

bly be supposed to lean, if he is left to the mere conduct of the light of nature. Now the insufficiency of nature's light in this point will be fully made appear, from the ensuing considerations; some of which are excellently discoursed by the ingenious Mr. Locke in his *Reasonableness of Christianity, as delivered in the Scripture*.^{*} If he had done as well in other points as in this, he had observed the thanks of all that wish well to Christianity: but so far as he follows the truth we shall take his assistance and improve some of his notions, adding such others, as are by him omitted, which may be judged of use to the case in hand.

1. Then we observe, that no man left to the conduct merely of nature's light, has offered us a complete body of morality. Some parts of our duty are pretty fully taught by philosophers and politicians. "So much virtue as was necessary to hold societies together, and to contribute to the quiet of governments, the civil laws of commonwealths taught, and forced upon men that lived under magistrates. But these laws, being for the most part made by such, who have no other aims but their own power, reached no farther than those things that would serve to tie men together in subjection; or at most, were directly to conduce to the prosperity and temporal happiness of any people. But natural religion in its full extent, was no where, that I know of, taken care of by the force of natural reason. It should seem by the little that hitherto has been done in it, that it is too hard a thing for unassisted reason to establish morality in all its parts, upon its true foundations, with a clear and convincing light."[†] Some parts have been noticed, and others quite omitted. A complete system of morality in its whole extent has never been attempted by the mere light of nature, much less completed.

2. To gather together the scattered rules that are to be met with in the writings of morality, and weave these shreds into a competent body of morality, in so far as even the particular direction of any one man would require, is a work of that immense labor, and requires so much learning, study and attention, that it has never been performed, and never like to be performed, and quite surmounts the capacity of most, if not of any one man. So that neither is there a complete body of morality given us by any one. Nor is it ever likely to be collected from those who have given us parcels of it.

3. Were all the moral directions of the ancient sages collected, it would not be a system that would be any way useful to the body of mankind. It would consist for most part of enigmatical, dark, and involved sentences, that would need a commentary too long for vulgar leisure to peruse, to make them intelligible. Any one that is in the least measure acquainted with the writings of the philosophers will not question this. Of what use would it be to read such morality as that of Pythagoras,[‡] whose famed sentences were, "Poke not in the fire with a sword; stride not over the beam of a balance; sit not upon a bushel; eat not the heart; take up your burthen with help; ease yourself of it with assistance; have always your bed clothes well tucked up; carry not the image of God about you in a ring," &c. Was this like to be of any use to mankind? No surely, some of them indeed speak more plain,

^{*} Reas. of Christ. p. 267.

[†] *Ibid.* p. 268.

[‡] Diog. Laert. Life of Pythagoras.

some of them less so ; but none of them sufficiently plain to be understood by the vulgar.

4. Further, were this collection made, and, upon other accounts, unexceptionable ; yet it would not be sufficiently full to be a universal directory. For, 1. Many important duties would be wanting. Self-denial, that consists in a mean opinion of ourselves, and leads to a submitting, and passing from all our most valuable concerns, when the honor of God requires it, is the fundamental duty of all religion, that which is of absolute necessity to a due acknowledgment of man's subjection and dependence ; and yet we shall find a deep silence in all the moralists about it. Which defect is the more considerable, that the whole of our apostacy is easily reducible to this one point, *an endeavor to subject the will, concerns and pleasures of God to our own*. And no act of obedience to him, can, without gross ignorance of his nature, and unacquaintedness with the extent of his knowledge, be presumed acceptable, which flows not from such a principle of self-denial, as fixedly prefer the concerns of God's glory to all other things. Again, what duty have we more need of, than that which is employed in forgiving enemies, nay in loving them ? We have frequent occasions for it. If we are not acquainted that this is duty, we must frequently run into the opposite sin. But where is this taught among the heathens ? Further, where shall we find a directory as to the inward frame and actings of our minds, guiding us how to regulate our thoughts, our designs ? Some notice is taken of the outward behavior ; but little of that which is the spring of it. Where is there a rule for the direction of our thoughts as to objects about which they should be employed, or as to the manner wherein they are to be conversant about them ? These things are of great importance, and yet by very far out of the ken of unenlightened nature. Divine and spiritual things were little known, and less thought of by philosophers. 2. As this system would be defective as to particular duties of the highest importance ; so it would be quite defective as to the grounds of those duties which are enjoined. It is not enough to recommend duty, that it is useful to us, or the societies we live in. When we act only on such grounds, we show some regard to ourselves, and the societies whereof we are members ; but none to God. Where are these cleared to be the laws of God ? Who is he that presses obedience upon the consciences of men, from the consideration of God's authority stamped upon these laws he prescribes ? And yet without this, you may call it what you will ; obedience you cannot call it. It is well observed by Mr. Locke,—“ Those just measures of right and wrong, which necessity had any where introduced, the civil laws prescribed, or philosophers recommended, stood not on their true foundations. They were looked on as bonds of society, and conveniences of common life, and laudable practices : but where was it that their obligation was thoroughly known, and allowed, and they received as precepts of a law, of the highest law, the law of nature ? That could not be without the clear knowledge of the lawgiver, and the great rewards or punishments for those that would not, or would obey. But the religion of the heathens, as was before observed, little concerned itself in their morals. The priests that delivered the oracles of heaven, and pretended to speak from the gods, spoke little of virtue and a good life. And on the other side,

the philosophers who spoke from reason, made not much mention of the Deity in their ethics.”*

5. Not only would this rule be defective and lame; but it would be found corrupt and pernicious. For, 1. Instead of leading them in the way, it would in many instances lead them aside. We should have here Epictetus binding you to temporize, and “worship the gods after the fashion of your country.”† You should find Pythagoras “forbidding you to pray for yourself to God,”‡ because you know not what is convenient. You should find Aristotle and Cicero commending *revenge* as a duty. The latter you should find defending Brutus and Cassius for killing Cæsar, and thereby authorizing the murder of any magistrates, if the actors can but persuade themselves that they are tyrants. Had we nothing to conduct us in our obedience and loyalty, but the sentiments of philosophers, no prince could be secure either of his life or dignity. You should find Cicero pleading for *self-murder*, from which he can never be freed, nor can any tolerable apology be made for him. Herein he was seconded by Brutus, Cato, Cassius, Seneca and others innumerable. Many of them practised it; others applauded of their sentiments in this matter. You may find a large account in Mr. Dodwel’s *Apology for the Philosophical Performances of Cicero* prefixed to Mr. Parker’s translation of his book *de Finibus*. And you may find the Deists justifying this in the preface to the *Oracles of Reason*, wherein Blount’s killing of himself is justified. Of the same mind was Seneca, who expressly advises the practice of it. We should here find *customary swearing commended*,§ if not by their precepts, yet by the examples of the *best moralists*, Plato, Socrates, and Seneca. In whom numerous instances of oaths by Jupiter, Hercules, and by beasts, do occur. In the same way we should find *unnatural lusts recommended*.|| Aristotle practised it. And Socrates is foully belied, if he loved not the same vice. Whence else could *Socratici Sinædi* come to be a proverb in Juvenal’s days. *Pride and self-esteem* were among their *virtues*. Which gives me occasion to observe, that this one thing overturned their whole morality. Epictetus, one of the best of all their moralists, tells us, “That the constitution and image of a philosopher is to expect good, as well as fear evil, only from himself.”¶ Seneca urgeth this every where—“*Sapiens tam æquo anima omnio apud alios videt, contemnitque, quam Jupiter: Et hoc se magis suspicit, quod Jupiter uti illis non potest, sapiens non vult.*”** And again, “*Est aliquid quo sapiens antecedit Deum. Ille naturæ beneficio, non suo sapiens est.*”†† *Incomptus vir sit externis et insuperabilis, miratorque tantum sui.*”‡‡ “Pride and self-esteem was a disease epidemical among them, and seems wholly incurable by any notions that they had. Some ar-

* Reasonableness of Christianity, p. 278.

† Epict. Enchirid. cap. 33.

‡ Diog. Laert. Vit. Pyth. p. 7.

§ Seneca de Ira, Lib. 3. cap. 15.

|| Diog. Laert. Vita Arist. Lib. 5. p. 323.

¶ Epict. Ench. cap. 27.

** Seneca, Epist. 73.—A wise man beholds and despises all things that he sees in the possession of others, with as easy a mind as Jupiter himself. And in this he admires himself the more, that Jupiter cannot use those things which he despises, whereas the wise man can use them, but will not.

†† Id. Epist. 53.—There is something in which a wise man excels God, as God is wise by the benefit of his nature, and not by his own.

‡‡ Id. de vita Beata, cap. 8.—Let a man be incorruptible and incorrigible by external things, and an admirer of himself alone.

rived to that impudence to compare themselves with, nay, prefer themselves before their own gods. It was either a horrible folly to deify what they postponed to their own self-estimation, or else it was a stupendous effect of their pride to prefer themselves to the gods that they worshipped. Never any man amongst them proposed the honor of their gods as the chief end of their actions, nor so much as dreamed of any such thing; it is evident that the best of them in their best actions reflected still back to themselves, and determined there, designing to set up a pillar to their own fame."* That known sentence of Cicero, who speaks out plainly what others thought, will justify this severe censure given by this worthy person, *Vult plane virtus honorem: Nec virtutis ulla alia merces.*† Were it needful, I might write volumes to this purpose, that would make one's flesh tremble to read. They who desire satisfaction in this point, may find it largely done by others. I shall conclude this first evidence of the corruption of their morality, with this general reflection of the learned Amyrald in his *Treatise of Religions*; "Scarce can there be found any commonwealth amongst those, which have been esteemed the best governed, in which some grand and signal vice has not been excused, or permitted, or even sometimes recommended by public laws.‡ 2. Not only did they enjoin wrong things; but they enjoined what was right to a *wrong end*, yea even their best things, as we heard just now, aimed at their own honor. We have heard Cicero to this purpose telling plainly *that honor was their aim*. Or what the poet said of Brutus killing his own sons when they intended the overthrow of the liberty of their country,

Vicit amor patriæ laudumque immensa cupido.§

is the most that can be pleaded for most of them. Others are plainly blasphemous, as we have heard from Seneca, designing to be above God by his virtue. At this rate this philosopher talks very oft: "Let philosophy," says he, "minister this to me, that it render me equal to God."|| To the maintenance of this, their notions about the soul of man contributed much; stiling it a piece clipt from God *Ἀποσπασμα τοῦ Θεοῦ*, or a part of God, *τοῦ Θεοῦ Μέρος*, as Epictetus speaks. Horace calls it *divinæ particula auræ*. Cicero in his *Somnium Scip.* tells us what they thought of themselves, *Deum scito te esse*—"Know thyself to be a God." And accordingly the Indian Brachmans vouched themselves for gods. And indeed they, who debased their gods below men, by their abominable characters of them, it was no wonder to find them prefer themselves to them. Nor did any run higher this way than Plato. Let any one read his arguments for the immortality of the soul, and if they prove any thing, they prove it *a God*. Thus they quite corrupted all they taught, by directing it to wrong ends. 3. This system would corrupt as to the fountain of virtue and its principle, teaching us to trust

* Sir Char. Wolseley's Reason of Scripture Belief, p. 118.

† *Cicero de Amicitia*.—Virtue certainly will have honor, nor is there any other reward of virtue.

‡ See instances to this purpose in a discourse of Moral Virtue, and in difference from Grace, p. 225.

§ The love of his country, and his immense desire of praise, overcame him.

|| Seneca, Epistle 48.

ourselves, and not depend on God for it. We have heard some speak to this purpose already; and Cicero may well be allowed to speak for the rest. "*A Deo tentum rationem habemus: bonam autem rationem aut non bonam a nobis.*"* And a little after, near the close of his book, after he has owned our external advantages of learning to be from God, he subjoins—"*Virtutem autem nemo unquam acceptam Deo retulit, nimirum recte: propter virtutem enim jure laudamur, et in virtute recte gloriamur, quod non contingeret, si id donum a Deo, non a nobis haberemus.*"† Thus we see how corrupt they were in this point, and it is here easily observable whence they were corrupted as to their chief end. He that believes that he has any thing that is not from God, will have somewhat also that he will not refer to him, as his chief end. 4. The corruption of this system, would in this appear, that it would be full of contradictions. Here we shall find nothing but endless jars; one condemning as abominable, what another approves and praises: whereby we should be led to judge neither right, rather than any of them. A man who, for direction, will betake himself to the declarations of the philosophers, goes into a wild wood of uncertainty, and into an endless maze, from which he should never get out. Plenty of instances, confirming these two last mentioned observations, might be adduced. If the reader desire them, I shall refer him to Mr. Locke's Essay on Human Understanding, book 1. chap. 3. parag. 9. where he may see it has been customary with not a few nations, to expose their children, bury them alive without scruple, fatten them for the slaughter, kill them and eat them, and dispatch their aged parents: yea, some he will find, have been so absurd, as to expect paradise as a reward of revenge, and of eating abundance of their enemies. Whether these instances will answer Mr. Locke's purpose, I dispute not now. I design not to make myself a party in that controversy. But I am sure such fatal mistakes, as to what is good and evil, are a pregnant evidence of the insufficiency of nature's light to afford us a complete rule of duty. If they, who were left to it, blundered so shamefully in the clearest cases, how shall we expect direction, as to those that are far more intricate?

6. Be this system never so complete, yet it can never be allowed to be a rule of life to mankind. This I cannot better satisfy myself upon, than by transcribing what the ingenious Mr. Locke has excellently discoursed on this head. "I will suppose there was a Stobeus in those times, who had gathered the moral sayings from all the sages of the world. What would this amount to, towards being a steady rule, a certain transcript of a law, that we are under? Did the saying of Aristippus, or Confucius, give it authority? Was Zeno a lawgiver to mankind? If not, what he or any other philosopher delivered, was but a saying of his. Mankind might hearken to it or reject it as they pleased, or as it suited their interest, passions, principles, or humors. They were under no obligation: The opinion of this or that philosopher, was of no authority. And if it were, you must take all he said under the same

* Cicero de Natura Deorum, Lib. 3. P. mihi, 173.—We have only reason from God, but we have good or bad reason from ourselves.

† But nobody ever acknowledged that he was indebted to God for his virtue, and certainly with good reason; for we are justly praised on account of our virtue, and we justly boast of it, which could not be the case, if we had that as a gift from God, and not from ourselves.

character. All his dictates must go for law, certain and true; or none of them. And then if you will take the moral sayings of Epicurus, (many whereof Seneca quotes with approbation) for precepts of the law of nature, you must take all the rest of his doctrine for such too, or else his authority ceases: so no more is to be received from him, or any of the sages of old, for parts of the law of nature, as carrying with them an obligation to be obeyed, but what they prove to be so. But such a body of ethics, proved to be the law nature, from principles or reason, and reaching all the duties of life, I think no body will say the world had before our Saviour's time." And I may add, nor to this day has by the mere light of nature. "It is not enough," continues he, "that there were up and down scattered sayings of wise men, conformable to right reason. The law of nature was the law of expediency too: and it is no wonder these men of parts, and studious of virtue, (who had occasion to think of any particular part of it) should, by meditation, light on the right, even from the observable expediency and beauty of it, without making out its obligation from the true principles of the law of nature, and foundations of morality." More he adds judiciously to this purpose; but this is enough. And hence it is plain, that such a system of morality would, if collected, at best be only a collection of problems, which every man is left at liberty to canvass, dispute, or reject; nay more, which every man is obliged to examine as to all its parts, in so far as it prescribes rules to him, and not to receive, but upon a discovery of its truth from its proper principles.

7. It is then plain that every man is left to his own reason to find out his duty by. He is not to receive it upon any other authority than that of reason, if revelation is rejected. He must find out therefore, in every case, what he is to do, and deduce its obligation from the principles of the law of nature. But who sees not, that the most part of men have neither leisure nor capacity for such a work? Men may think duty easy to be discovered now, when Christianity has cleared it up. But Mr. Locke well observes, "That the first knowledge of those truths, which have been discovered by Christian philosophers, or philosophers since Christianity prevailed, is owing to revelation; though as soon as they are heard and considered, they are found to be agreeable to reason, and such as can by no means be contradicted. Every one may observe a great many truths which he receives at first from others, and readily assents to, as consonant to reason, which he would have found it hard, and perhaps beyond his strength to have discovered himself. Native and original truth, is not so easily wrought out of the mine, as we who have it delivered ready dug and fashioned into our hands, are apt to imagine. And how often at fifty, and threescore years old, are thinking men told, what they wonder how they could miss thinking of? Which yet their own contemplations did not, and possibly never would have helped them to. Experience shows, that the knowledge of morality, by mere natural light (how agreeable soever it be to it), makes but a slow progress and little advance in the world: whatever was the cause, it is plain in fact, that human reason, unassisted, failed men in its great and proper business of morality."

8. As it is unquestionably certain, that the most part of mankind are not able, by their own reason to frame a complete body of morality for themselves, or find out what is their own duty in every particular in-

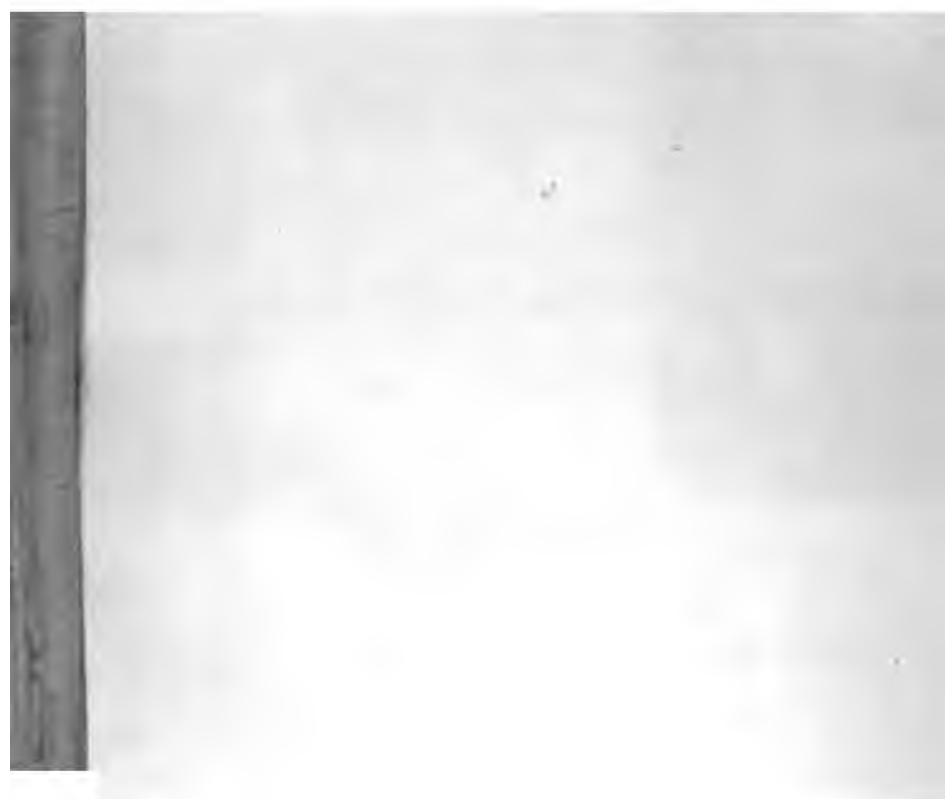
stance. (I shall not speak of any man's being obliged to discover what belongs to other people's duty, lest our antagonists should suspect I designed to open a door for priests, a set of men and an office which they mortally hate). I speak only of what is every one's duty in particular. And I say it is evident, that the most part of mankind are unable to find this, which is not to be done, but by such strains of reasoning, and connexion of consequences, which they have neither leisure to weigh, nor, for want of capacity, education and use, skill to judge of; and as I say, they are unable for this, so I fear this task will be found too hard for the ablest philosophers. Particular duties are so many, and many of them so remote from the first principles, and the connexion is so subtle and fine spun, that I fear not to say that it must escape the piercing eyes of the most acute philosophers: and if they engage in pursuit of the discovery, through so many and so subtle consequences, they must either quit the unequal chace, or lose themselves instead of finding truth and duty. And if we allow ourselves to judge of what shall be, by what has been the success of such attempts, I am sure this is more than bare guess.

9. It is farther to be observed, that no tolerable progress could be made herein, were it to be done before advanced years. But it is certain, that youth, as well as riper age, is under the law of nature, and that that age needs clear discoveries of duty the more, that in it irregular passions and inclinations are more vigorous, and it is exposed to more temptations than any other part of a man's life; and besides, it wants the advantages of experience, to fortify it against the dangerous influence of them, which advanced years are attended with. Now it will be to no purpose to me, to find out some years hence what was my duty before, as to obedience; for now the season is over. The law may discover my sin, but can never regulate my practice, in a period of my life that is past and gone. Every man must have the knowledge of each day's duty in its season. This is not to be had from the light of nature. If we are left at a loss in our younger years, as nature's light will have us, we may be ruined before knowledge come. Much sin must be contracted, and ill habits are like to be very much strengthened before any stop come: yea, they may be so strong, that the foundation of inevitable ruin may be laid.

Finally, knowledge is requisite before acting; at least, in order of nature it is so, and must, at least in order of time, be contemporary. Action gives not always time for long reasoning and weighing such trains of consequences, as are requisite to clear duties from the first principles of nature's light, and enforce their obligation. And therefore man left to it, is in a miserable plight, not much unlike to the case of the Romans, *Dum deliberant Romani capitur Saguntum*:* While he is searching for duty, the season is lost; and the discovery, if it comes, arrives too late to be of any use.

It is in vain for any to pretend, that the knowledge of duty is connate to the mind of man. Whatever may be pretended as to a few of the first principles of morality, and it is but a very few of which this can be alleged, yet it is certain, it can never be without impudence extended to the thousandth part of the duties we are bound to in particular cases.

* While the Romans were deliberating, Saguntum was taken.







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